

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 11.2-16

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
THE CONTEXT OF 1 CORINTHIANS 11.2-16	6
Historical Context	6
Literary Context	28
EXEGESIS OF THE TEXT	33
Verse 2	33
Verse 3	35
Verse 4	44
Verse 5	47
Verse 6	55
Verse 7	59
Verses 8-9	62
Verse 10	64
Verses 11-12	74
Verse 13	76
Verses 14-15	78
Verse 16	82
CONCLUSION	87
APPENDIX 1: THE MEANING OF <u>KEPHALĒ</u> CONTINUED	100
APPENDIX 2: THE NATURE OF THE COVERING	102
WORKS CITED	109

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Introduction

D. R. Dungan has rightly stated: “Man is fallible, and his judgment is very imperfect. Nothing has ever been written which has been understood by all alike” (2). Dungan’s observation aptly characterizes 1 Corinthians 11.2-16, considered by many to be “among the most challenging passages in the Bible” (K. Wilson 442). A small mountain of literature has been written about this section of Scripture, which has by no means relieved its obscurity (Meeks 70). That this passage is difficult no one will deny, but the difficulty has been accentuated by multiple and varying translations, interpretations, and applications, not all of which have been complimentary to the inspired writer’s original purpose.

In this text is Paul “clearly protecting the right of women to speak in public assembly when they are leading worship” (Scroggs, “Eschatological Woman” 284-98), or is it the case that “Paul forbids women to lead a mixed assembly” (McGuiggan 231)? Does the apostle affirm in verse 16 that “we have no such custom” (ASV), or is he saying that “we have no other practice” (NASB)? Are these instructions based “on the social practice of the day” (Roberts 183) or “not affected by human customs” (L. Thomas 6)? Are the specific details of this passage “not binding on us” (Weeks 21), or is failure to comply with them “sure to result in final damnation” (Rester 6)? In order to rise above much of the controversy and confusion, careful attention must be given to the total evidence, the handling of that evidence, and the conclusions drawn from the handling of the evidence (Warren 19).

The primary aim of any competent Bible student is to apply his understanding of the text to the contemporary church and world (Fee, N.T. Exegesis 21). J. W. Roberts has observed that among churches of Christ there have generally been four positions on the present-day application of this passage: (1) The covering of 1 Cor. 11.2 ff. is merely the natural covering of hair and no artificial

covering is involved (cf. Coffman 165-79). (2) There are two coverings under consideration (long hair and a veil), and Paul binds both of them on all Christian women (cf. Lipscomb 162-69). (3) The requirement is general involving some “sign of authority” on a woman’s head, the nature of which may be determined by contemporary styles (e.g. a hat), and is continually binding on churches (cf. Jackson 1-23). (4) The principles behind Paul’s instruction (i.e. female subjection and modesty) are universal, but the head-covering directives are based on social custom and not applicable in all cultures today (cf. Roberts 183-98).

One author has presumptuously written: “In hope of satisfying the conscientious and silencing the contentious I now adapt the explanation of this passage from the pen of outstanding Bible scholars that the reader might understand just exactly what the Holy Spirit was here saying . . .” (Rester 31). The obvious question is, which scholars can be absolutely trusted to provide the exact interpretation that the Holy Spirit intended? The writer who made the above statement went on to quote several scholars who agree with the position he advocates, but what about the multitude of scholars who disagree? Apparently whichever position one wishes to take, any number of scholars can be quoted for reinforcement. Howbeit, as J. D. Thomas observes, “some are wrong, even though their motives might be good” (308). An uninformed reader, by considering the various scholarly explanations of this passage, will likely become even more perplexed.

Much of the confusion can be alleviated by realizing that many apparent contradictions among scholarly writers are often the result of over-generalizations and a failure to qualify information. As this study is approached, the following qualifiers should be taken into account:

1. What is the time period to which the writer is alluding? Some sources make reference to “Bible times,” yet the Bible covers a period of thousands of years. Customs could, and often did,

change from one generation to the next. For example: “Men in early Greece and Rome wore beards and allowed the hair of the skull to grow long. From the fifth century [BC] the Greeks cut the hair of their skulls short, and from the time of Alexander they shaved their chins. The Romans followed suit in the third century B. C., but from the time of Hadrian they again wore beards” (Hammond and Schullard 914). To make a general statement about men’s hair styles and beards in “Bible times” can obviously be inaccurate and misleading.

2. The type of covering and how it was worn needs to be clarified. A woman wearing something over her head with her face uncovered might be described by one writer as being “veiled,” and by another, “unveiled.” Are the coverings under consideration articles which covered the whole head and face (Winters 148), or only the top of the head (Jackson 16), or is Paul not even considering artificial coverings (Coffman 171-78)?

3. If possible, the geographical location of a given practice should be identified. People sharing the same ethnic heritage may have had different customs, depending on where they lived. For instance, it appears that Jewish women in various locations ordinarily did not cover their faces, although the Jewesses of Arabia did (Cheyne and Black 4:5247).

4. If worship or prayer is under consideration, it is important to specify whether it is Jewish, Christian, or pagan. If some Romans customarily observed a particular ritual, is it a valid inference that all Romans did? Is it to be assumed that if pagan Greeks practiced something, it was necessarily practiced by Greek Christians?

5. Caution should be exercised when basing one’s conclusions about ancient customs on the evidence of paintings, sculptures, and other representations. Do these works of art depict reality or fiction? Are they representative of respectable or immoral persons? Since Paul compared the Christian life to that of athletes (1 Cor. 9.24-27), and vase paintings of Paul’s day depict naked

athletes (Boyd 195), can a reasonable case be made for public nudity?

6. What is the source of the writer's information? Sometimes a contemporary scholar is quoted to validate a particular point, with seemingly little or no regard for the data upon which his arguments are based. In commenting on a view for which he sees vague historical support, Gordon Fee remarks: "it seems to be the case of one scholar's guess becoming a second scholar's footnote and a third scholar's assumption" (1 Cor. 511). A great deal of miscommunication has resulted from the failure of many authors to go deep enough in their study to clarify and validate their conclusions. Schreiner suggests: "Examination by the student of authors' methods and presuppositions should help the student understand why scholars reach different conclusions" (Interpreting 71).

7. Sources should be considered qualitatively. Just because something has been written on a given topic and put into print does not automatically ensure that it is authoritative or reliable. Many sources lack enough depth and/or scholarship to make significant contributions to this study. Recent discoveries and ongoing scholarly deliberation have generally rendered a number of the older reference works insubstantial and antiquated (cf. Bauer v - x).

8. If the literature of antiquity is used to establish an argument, the type of literature it was originally intended to be (i.e. historical, fictional, etc.) should be determined. If two ancient writers seem to be saying conflicting things, more significance should be placed on the one which is most relevant to this study, considering such matters as date, location, subject matter, and genre.

The goal of biblical exegesis is to bring out the exact meaning of the text which the writer intended for the original recipients, while being careful not to "archaize the present or modernize the past" (Craddock 159). Exegesis involves "the careful, meticulous, and thorough

interpretation of a literary work a rigorous and exacting study” (Young 1). Since presuppositions are involved in every aspect of exegesis, and an interpreter’s work is influenced by his own attitudes, prejudices, and personality (Flatt 60), one must avoid reaching dogmatic conclusions before the text is carefully and honestly examined. J. D. Thomas rightly observes that there “are about as many different sets of presuppositions as there are interpreters, and many of these are in diametrical opposition to each other” (308). While admittedly difficult at times, though not impossible, the conscientious exegete must allow the text to modify and to mold his attitudes and beliefs rather than reading into it his own ideas (Flatt 60-72).

Often the true meaning of a passage can be displaced either by failing to examine it thoroughly enough, thereby neglecting pertinent information, or by being excessively intricate and losing sight of how it relates to the overall context of Scripture. Young suggests that the “first thing an exegete must do is to step back from the text to see the entire picture,” since both the audience and situation influence the formation of the message (1-2). The issue of genre is another important consideration. The thirteen documents attributed to Paul are letters, all of which were written to specific situations and to address particular problems. The interpreter, then, must always keep in mind the specific circumstance that was being addressed and reconstruct from the letter itself the situation that existed in the particular church or individual life. Only then can Paul’s response be sufficiently understood (Schreiner, Interpreting 23-43; Fee, N.T. Exegesis 22-23).

The Context of 1 Corinthians 11.2-16

The matter of establishing context is vital to understanding any passage. Context refers to “the connection of thought that the passage bears to the larger discussion of which it is a part,” and includes the immediate context of the passage, the context of the entire book, the overall context of Scripture, and the general historical-cultural setting (Kelcy, “Identifying” 73-79).

Consideration of context is important because no writer can be expected to say everything on any given subject. Writers often “allow as much as possible to be inferred from the immediate situation, shared experiences, shared knowledge, cultural mores, and prior statements in the same or related discussions Thus the interpretation of Greek words and syntax is often dependent on information that is not explicit in the text” (Young 2-3).

Historical Context

To guard against an interpreter reading his own desires and viewpoints into the text, Flatt recommends that he “first view a passage in terms of its historical and cultural setting, the intent of the author for his original audience, and the message they likely would have derived from it” (70). The audience to whom 1 Corinthians was initially addressed is “a specific historical instance not to be absorbed into any other” (Craddock 159). Therefore a general knowledge of the historical background is important to help understand the ideas and the problems and concerns the readers faced at the time the document was written (J. Thomas 313).

Authorship

Nearly everyone accepts that the epistle of 1 Corinthians is an authentic document from the pen of the apostle Paul (cf. Schreiner, *Interpreting* 70; Ellis, “Traditions” 481). Farrar makes the general observation that “the external and the internal evidence is so indisputable, that not a single writer of the smallest importance, however ‘advanced’ his school of criticism, has ever ventured to question its cogency” (Farrar and Thomas v).

There are, however, several scholars who maintain that “there has been an editorial hand at work in the Corinthian correspondence” (Cope 435), and that certain sections of 1 Corinthians were not actually written by the apostle. William O. Walker, Jr. has proposed that 1 Cor. 11.2-16 is an interpolation, that it is actually composed of three separate texts, and that none of these texts was written by Paul (97-110). But Walker’s case is somewhat weakened by the fact that his arguments “make too easy assumptions about the editorial process” (Orr and Walther 259). This novel theory has been convincingly refuted by Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, who affirms “that the arguments used to justify it are highly questionable on both factual and methodological grounds” (“Non-Pauline?” 615-21; cf. Thiselton 520-21). Lamar Cope has slightly modified Walker’s hypothesis and argues that the absence of any inherent unity in the passage strongly suggests that it is a non-Pauline interpolation (435-36). But Cope’s arguments are no more convincing than Walker’s (cf. Meeks 220 n. 107), and by simply affirming that a theory is possible, it is by no means made any more probable (cf. Murphy-O’Connor, “Sex and Logic” 482-83). Since no extant manuscript lacks 1 Cor. 11.2-16, there is no legitimate reason to assume that it is a post-Pauline addition (Ellis, “Traditions” 493).

Date of Writing

Absolute certainty about the dating of 1 Corinthians is difficult because of the complicated nature of the historical background (Guthrie, N.T. Introduction 441). It is generally agreed that Paul wrote this epistle from Ephesus in mid-spring (cf. 16.8), sometime in the mid-fifties AD. Depending on the time of his departure from Corinth (Acts 18.18), a general date can be determined with a margin of error of scarcely more than a couple of years either way (J. Robinson 32). One of the few certain dates in the New Testament, from which most of the dates for Paul’s writings are derived, is the time of Gallio in Corinth. The Gallio inscription, discovered at Delphi

and published in 1905, and the statement in Acts 18.12 place Gallio and Paul in Corinth between AD 50 and 52. Paul would have written 1 Corinthians about three to five years after he departed Corinth (Hodge xii; Fee, 1 Cor. 4-5). Various dates have been suggested, ranging from AD 53 to 57 (Barrett 5; Lenski 13).

Audience

The letter is addressed “to God’s called-out people in Corinth . . .” (1.2).¹ Jackson, in seeking to broaden the scope of some of Paul’s directives, argues that “the epistle is addressed not only to Corinth, but to ‘all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place’ (1 Corinthians 1:2)” (2-4). However, when Paul’s opening statement is examined more closely, it is evident that every Christian is not said to be the addressee of the letter. It is specifically addressed to those in Corinth, whose sanctification is with (sun) all other disciples. There is no doubt that the principles taught in 1 Corinthians apply to all believers in every place (cf. 7.17; 14.33-34). But this letter is an occasional document, initially responding to issues and problems in the lives of those living in a specific location, at a certain time, and under particular historical and cultural circumstances (Oster 12).

Paul traveled to Corinth sometime around AD 51, remaining there at least “a year and six months, teaching God’s message among them” (Acts 18.11). His labors, with the assistance of Aquila, Priscilla, Silas, and Timothy (Acts 18.1-5), resulted in the establishment of a Christian community in this great city. After his departure, the apostle seems to have had no communications with the brethren at Corinth until sometime during his three years’ ministry in Ephesus (Acts 20.31; 1 Cor. 16.8).

Paul wrote a letter to these Christians in which he warned them not to associate with immoral people (5.9), but they apparently did not fully understand his instructions (5.10, 11). Timothy

was sent to Corinth to remind them of the apostle's teachings (4.17). Paul then received reports from Chloe's household of certain disorders among the disciples (1.11). He also welcomed a delegation from the church, viz. Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16.17), who delivered a letter from the brethren seeking his advice on various questions (7.1). Although Paul had previously spent at least eighteen months teaching them, and had sent them a letter and a personal representative, there were still several matters which needed his attention. In response, their spiritual "father" (4.15) wrote 1 Corinthians.

Cultural, Religious, and Social Considerations

A valid observation is made by Engberg-Pedersen, who says: "We do not know more about the specific situation that lies behind Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians than what may be gathered from the two extant letters to Corinth themselves" ("The Gospel" 561). While this may be true, there are other sources of information which also prove helpful in understanding certain matters relevant to this study. The historical background, social conditions, and cultural influences do not come "as a separately packaged body of information but are mediated through the Corinthian correspondence and related literature" (Craddock 161). As much as for any other document in the New Testament, "the various sociological, economic, and religious factors that make up the environment of the city of Corinth have a profound influence on one's understanding of Paul's letters to the church there" (Fee, 1 Cor. 1; cf. Bauer xxiv).

When the tent-making missionary arrived in Corinth, the city was less than a hundred years old, having been destroyed and later rebuilt by the Romans (Veitch 60). The city was strategically located, with the main land route between East and West passing through it and several sea routes converging on its two harbors. It was the capital of the province of Achaia and the seat of the Roman proconsul (Guthrie, N.T. Introduction 421). Corinth was a center of industry and

commerce, and the location of the Isthmian games (Malherbe 76-77). “Like most urban centers, the population of Corinth was highly mobile. Many came from rural areas looking for gain in the city. Others were there with the military, or in government service, or because of business with foreign traders” (Craddock 159).

Corinth was the home of the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Vice and religion flourished side by side (Fee, 1 Cor. 2-3). The statue of Aphrodite stood on the Corinthian Acropolis, and crowds of prostitutes took part in the service of her sanctuary. It was customary that whenever the state offered prayers to the goddess, the prostitutes would join in the prayers and be present at the sacrifice (Frazer 31). “In such an atmosphere of moral laxity and intellectual pride the Corinthian church was bound to be troubled with many problems arising from the impact of Christianity on its pagan environment” (Guthrie, N.T. Introduction 422).

The population of Corinth was diverse -- socially, economically, religiously, and culturally. The Roman element was strong in this Greek city, but there were also large populations of Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians, and Jews (Malherbe 76; Oster 16-25). Veitch describes the community as comprising “Jews from various cultures; converted Jews from different social backgrounds; non-Jews from various ethnic backgrounds; people of social standing, others of lower status; women of rank; others from ordinary backgrounds; some wealthy people, some poor; some highly educated, others not” (60).

The social make-up of the church at Corinth is suggested in 1 Cor. 1.26, where Paul states: “Consider your calling, brothers, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many influential, not many of high social status, are called.” Three sociological categories are indicated here: the eugeneis (“noble,” ASV), those whose wisdom was a sign of their social status, and those who were socially influential (Malherbe 71-72). While the majority appears to have been of relatively

low social status, this verse implies that at least some of the members were counted among the upper class.

The social stratification of the church becomes even more evident when references to individual members are considered. Among those mentioned are Crispus, a ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18.8; 1 Cor. 1.14), Erastus, the city treasurer (Rom. 16.23), Gaius, a host to Paul and to the whole congregation (Rom. 16.23), and the household of Stephenus (1 Cor. 1.16; 16.15-18). Based on the evidences of occupation or position, households, services rendered, and travels, Gerd Thiessen has concluded that at least nine of the seventeen persons and groups listed enjoyed relatively high social status (73-96). The upper class members, or “the dominating minority,” were apparently the most active and prominent members, and were probably responsible for much of the tension in the congregation (Malherbe 71-76). Although social status may not have been the chief cause of many of the problems, it most likely intensified them (cf. Thiessen 69-174).

The Christian community at Corinth consisted of people from very different backgrounds: Jews, Greeks, slaves, and free (12.13). Of the seventeen known names of these disciples, eight are Latin names (Malherbe 76). At least three of these were Jews (Aquila, Priscilla, Crispus), the others were probably Roman, and the rest of those mentioned had Greek names. Religiously, while some obviously had past affiliations with Judaism (cf. McEleney 326-27), very little in the letter suggests a Jewish background for most of the members. The former life of the majority appears to have been idolatrous (cf. 6.10-11; 8.7; 12.2). The church at Corinth was predominantly Gentile, the majority of whom were of lower social status, along with Jewish and upper class minorities. With such cultural and social diversity, problems with integration were inevitable.

Relevant Customs

While many argue that the instructions in 1 Cor. 11.2-16 have nothing to do with social customs (cf. Terry 4-9; Jackson 6-15), an appeal to ancient practices is still often made to validate this conclusion. The problem is, the same appeal is also made by those who hold the opposite view! That the matter of ascertaining relevant customs is no simple task may be seen from the following quotations.

According to Wight, in Manners and Customs of Bible Lands: “The veil was the distinctive female wearing apparel. All females, with the exception of maidservants and women in a low condition of life, wore a veil. They would usually never [sic] lay it aside . . .” (98-99). Peloubet’s Bible Dictionary, however, makes the opposite claim: “In ancient times the veil was adopted only in exceptional cases . . .” (719). Barrett holds the position that a “Jewish woman was always veiled in public” (251), while others give the impression that Jewesses did not “usually wear veils even out of doors” (Cheyne and Sutherland 4:5247). It is stated in Harper’s Encyclopedia of Bible Life that “it was customary for Jewish women to keep their heads covered after marriage, a style that distinguished them from most other women in the Roman Empire” (Miller and Miller 52). But M’Clintock and Strong’s Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature contains contradictory information: “The Hebrews do not appear to have regarded a covering for the head as an essential article of every-day dress” (4:111). The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia affirms that “among both Greeks and Romans, reputable women wore a veil in public” (Orr 4:3047). On the other hand, Albrecht Oepke argues that “it is quite wrong that Greek women were under some kind of compulsion to wear a veil in public” (Kittel and Friedrich 3:562).

In The Lion Handbook to the Bible the statement is made: “Greek women, as well as men,

prayed bareheaded. Roman and Jewish men and women prayed with their heads covered” (Alexander and Alexander 593). Fee, however, says that there is almost no evidence “that men in any of the cultures (Greek, Roman, Jew) covered their heads” (1 Cor. 507). Vincent writes: “In the sculptures of the catacombs the women have a close-fitting head-dress, while the men have the hair short” (3:248). Echols, on the other hand, observes: “Drawings in the catacombs do not bear out the assumption that Christian women wore veils at services in the early church” (Coffman 166).

Is there any wonder why so much confusion and frustration exist among those who seek to understand the context and meaning of this passage? However, when consideration is given to the qualifying guidelines listed in the first chapter of this thesis, many of these contradictions can be eliminated. These examples illustrate the weaknesses of many older or less substantial reference works, and the importance of studying primary sources rather than depending on secondary ones.

Information which is pertinent to this study may be classified as “background” and “foreground” material. Relevant Greek, Roman, and Jewish literature, history, and customs may be termed the “background” to the New Testament, while early Christian literature, history, and practices may be designated the “foreground.” Although these sources do not determine the meaning of the text, they provide valuable information which helps attain a proper historical perspective on the meaning of the text. “History, customs, and literature surrounding the New Testament make known what was historically possible. Even more so, they make known what was historically likely or probable in a given situation” (Ferguson 254-59).

Head-coverings

Plutarch (ca. AD 50-125) was a child when Paul preached in Corinth and later wrote the

epistle of 1 Corinthians. A Greek from Chaeronea, Plutarch, was educated in Athens, about 65 kilometers from Corinth, and served as ambassador and later procurator of Achaia, the province where Corinth was located (Stadter xxi-xxiii; Trench 1-7). Plutarch wrote An Enquiry into the Fashions and Customs of Rome, or more commonly known as Roman Questions, to explain from a Greek perspective certain Roman practices.

In Roman Questions 14 he writes:

. . . now more ordinary it is with women to go abroad with their heads veiled and covered: and likewise with men, to be discovered and bare headed. For even among the Greeks when there is befallen unto them any public calamity, the manner and custom is, that the women should cut off the hairs of their head, and the men wear them long; for that otherwise it is usual that men should poll their heads, and women keep their hair long. (Holland 22-23)

Plutarch is commenting on the unusual practice among the Romans of sons covering their heads and daughters being uncovered on special occasions (e.g. funerals), but states that the usual practice is for women to be veiled or covered and for men to be uncovered. He then compares this to a Greek custom. The fact that the Greeks thought it was peculiar for Roman men to be veiled and women unveiled, which prompted this question, probably indicates that the custom which Plutarch calls “ordinary” was similar among the Greeks.

Oepke tries to discredit Plutarch’s observation by saying that it “refers to Roman custom, concerning which Plut[arch] may not have been too well informed . . .” (Kittel and Friedrich 3:562). But this criticism is unfounded considering that Plutarch was a Roman citizen, made trips to and actually lived in Rome for a time, and based his information in Roman Questions on extensive research, citing such Roman authorities as Varro, Cato, Cluvius Rufus, Cicero,

Antistius Labeo, Livy, and Juba (Holland xiii-xlv).

In his Moralia, writing about an early king of Sparta, Plutarch states: “When someone inquired why they took their girls into public places unveiled, but their married women veiled, he said, ‘Because the girls have to find husbands, and the married women have to keep to those who have them!’” (Babbitt 392-93). While this information shows a distinction between the dress of married and unmarried females, Grant and Kitzinger point out that age was also a factor (3:1405). Bruce Terry disregards the relevance of Plutarch’s statement, saying that although “Sparta was a region in Greece, Corinth was not in Sparta . . .” (8). Yet the closeness of time, location, and culture to first-century Corinth is not insignificant.

Dio Chrysostom (AD 40-120), another contemporary of Paul, was a Greek philosopher from Bithynia. Concerning the apostle’s hometown, Tarsus, he writes (33:48):

Among these is the convention regarding feminine attire, a convention which prescribes that women should be so arrayed and should so deport themselves when in the street that nobody could see any part of them, neither of the face nor of the rest of the body, and that they themselves might not see anything off the road while they have their faces covered as they walk. (Cohoon and Crosby 3:319)

Although Tarsus was in Asia Minor, the above statement is not without relevance to this study. Tarsus was a Greek city in a Roman province, and a Jewish segment was included among its population (cf. Acts 21.39; 22.3, 27-28).

In Mishnaic times (450 BC - early third century AD) it was regarded as an inviolable Jewish custom:

that women should not be seen in the streets with uncovered hair (Ket. vii. 6); and the infringement of that rule by a married woman was deemed sufficient ground for divorce, a

view stated also in Roman law Bareheadedness in a woman was, therefore, considered to be an indecorous form of “‘ervah” (nakedness, Deut. xxiv. 1), an incentive to improper glances The married woman was henceforth all the more scrupulous in covering every part of her hair, probably because its concealment was the mark of distinction of married women among the people surrounding the Jews (The Jewish Encyclopedia 2:530-31; cf. 6:158)

The Talmud (Bara Kama, 90 a) warns that if someone removes a woman’s head-dress in public, “he is fined four hundred zouzim” (Hershon 118).

Alfred Edersheim, commenting on the custom of Jewish men in the first century AD, writes: “In regard to the covering of the head, it was deemed a mark of disrespect to walk abroad, or to pass a person, with bared head” (Life and Times 622). This information, however, is historically displaced. According to Jewish history:

after R[abbi] Joshua ben Levi had taught that “a man ought not to walk four cubits in an erect position, which suggests overbearing pride, ignoring God’s omnipresence,” Rab[bi] Huna, the son of Joshua, would not walk four cubits without having his head covered, for he said: “The Shekinah is above my head” (Kid. 31a). He declared this custom to be especially meritorious (Shab. 118b), and in the course of time it was adopted as a general rule of Jewish conduct. (The Jewish Encyclopedia 2:532; cf. 6:493)

The rabbi after whom this custom was adopted died in AD 410, therefore the evidence is lacking which suggests that Jewish men in the first century AD routinely covered their heads.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. AD 153-220), a Christian teacher in North Africa, wrote The Instructor as a treatise on Christian education. In chapter 12 of Book 3 he addresses the topic of proper attire for men and women in the assembly. He observes:

Woman and man are to go to church decently attired Let the woman observe this, further. Let her be entirely covered, unless she happens to be at home. For that style of dress is grave, and protects from being gazed at [sic]. And she will never fall, who puts before her eyes modesty, and her shawl; nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face. For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled. (Coxe 2:290)

While this information may not fit exactly into the historical-cultural setting of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, it is close enough to be of some benefit. Moreover, Apollos, who was also from Alexandria (Acts 18.24), had had significant influence among the Christians to whom Paul writes (Acts 18.27 - 19.1; 1 Cor. 1.12; etc.).

Tertullian (ca. AD 160-220) was a Christian in Carthage, who later joined the sect of the Montanists. This sect was founded in the mid-second century AD by a self-proclaimed prophet who perceived Christianity as becoming too successful and worldly. The Montanists denounced second marriages, flight from persecution, attendance at the games, and military service. They also insisted on strict self-discipline and self-denial, including long fasts (Pike 263). In Tertullian's works Against Marcion, On Prayer, and On Female Dress, he expresses his views about religious practices and heresies and gives his interpretation of Scripture. In the seventh chapter of his discourse On Female Dress, Tertullian writes: "God bids you 'be veiled.' I believe [He does so] for fear the heads of some should be seen!" (Roberts and Donaldson 1:323).

In chapters 21 and 22 of his treatise On Prayer, Tertullian discusses the question of whether or not virgins ought to be veiled like the married women. He writes:

. . . under the name of "woman," even the "virgin" is bidden to be veiled. Equally in each sex let the younger age follow the discipline of the elder This custom, in short,

even Israel observes; but if [Israel] did not observe it, our Law, amplified and supplemented, would vindicate the addition for itself; let it be excused for imposing the veil on virgins also Why do you denude before God what you cover before men? Will you be more modest in public than in church? Be veiled, virgin, if virgin you are; for you ought to blush. If you are a virgin, shrink from [the gaze of] many eyes You do well in falsely assuming the married character, if you veil your head; nay, you do not seem to assume it falsely, for you are wedded to Christ If He bids the brides of others to be veiled, His own, of course, much more. “But each individual man is not to think that the institution of his predecessor is to be overturned.” Many yield up their own judgment, and its consistency, to the custom of others Touching such, however, as are betrothed, I can with constancy “above my small measure” pronounce and attest that they are to be veiled . . . (Roberts and Donaldson 1:195-99)

The above statements reveal the following: (1) It was the usual practice in the church at Carthage (or at least in the Montanist sect) for married and betrothed women to be veiled at all times, in and outside the assemblies; (2) It was Tertullian’s conviction that unmarried girls should practice the same custom; and (3) This practice, at least among married women, was customary among the general public. While the writings of Tertullian are interesting and useful, they are admittedly in a setting which is somewhat removed from the context of 1 Corinthians. However, in the eighth chapter of his treatise On the Veiling of Virgins, Tertullian argues that the Corinthians of Paul’s day had understood the apostle’s discourse on female coverings, and he appeals to the fact that the Corinthian women of his (Tertullian’s) day wore veils (Coxe 4:32-33).

John Chrysostom (AD 347-407), being from Antioch, would have been familiar with Greek culture, especially from a Christian perspective. He did, however, live about 300 years after

Paul's letters were written to the Corinth church. Nevertheless, in his twenty-sixth Homily (a commentary on 1 Corinthians 11), he writes the following:

For perhaps some one might here have doubt also, questioning with himself, what sort of crime it was that the woman should be uncovered, or that the man should be covered? What sort of crime then it is, learn now from hence. Symbols many and diverse have been given both to man and woman; to him of rule, to her of subjection: and among them this also, that she should be covered, while he hath his head bare. If now these be symbols, you see that both err, when they disturb the order and the disposition of God, and transgress their proper limits, both the man falling into the woman's inferiority, and the woman rising up against the man, by her outward habiliments And tell me not this, that the error is but small. For first, it is great, even of itself: being as it is disobedience. Next, though it were small, it became great, because of the greatness of the things whereof it is a sign. However, that it is a great matter, is evident from its ministering so effectually to good order among mankind, the governor and the governed being regularly kept in their several places by it Well then: the man he compelleth not to be always uncovered, but when he prays only But the woman he commands to be at all times covered He signifies that not at the time of prayer only, but also continually, she ought to be covered and establishing them both ways, from what was customary, and from their contraries It follows, that being covered is a mark of subjection and of power. For it induces her to look down, and be ashamed, and preserve entire her proper virtue His constant practice of stating commonly received reasons, he adopts also in this place, betaking himself to the common custom, and greatly abashing those who waited to be taught these things from him, which even from men's ordinary practice they might

have learned. For such things are not unknown even to Barbarians For if one ought not to have the head bare, but every where to carry about the token of subjection, much more is it becoming to exhibit the same in our deeds. (Parker 349-68)

From the above quotation it can be observed that: (1) The women in the church at Antioch in the fourth-century AD wore head-coverings all the time, in and outside the assemblies; (2) To them the head-covering symbolized subordinate status; and (3) This was a common custom, not limited to the church.

While John Chrysostom and his writings are separated from the date of Paul and his writings by about three centuries, they are still nearer in time and place than that of modern scholars. Chrysostom was in a better position than most to preserve and transmit authentic information. He understood Greek customs, spoke the same language, and lived relatively close to the same historical and cultural setting to which 1 Corinthians was addressed. Although early Christian writers were most certainly not always right, they were in a good position to preserve the original sense of a passage (Ferguson 256). Furthermore, one characteristic of ancient styles of dress was that they changed less rapidly than fashions do today (Grant and Kitzinger 3:1385).

The Symbolism of Hair Length

Distinction in Genders

The evidence of the New Testament indicates that women generally wore long hair and it was one of the characteristics which differentiated them from men. Mary's hair was long enough to be used in drying Jesus's feet (John 11.2; cf. Luke 7.38). Paul affirms that a woman's long hair is a glory to her (1 Cor. 11.15). The description in Revelation 9.8, "their hair was like the hair of women," shows the distinguishing nature of hair length. It was considered disgraceful for a man to have long hair (1 Cor. 11.14).

In his fictional work Metamorphoses 2.8, Apuleius (AD 125 - ?), a Roman philosopher from Carthage, writes:

I had carefully surveyed all her beauties. But why do I speak of other beauties, when my sole thought has ever been first to look at the head and hair with eager staring gaze and to delight myself with dreaming of it when I am alone? . . . the hair is the fairest part of the body . . . if you should despoil the head of an exquisitely beautiful woman of its hair and deprive her face of its natural adornment, though she had descended from heaven . . . and yet were bald, she would give no pleasure even to Vulcan, her amorous spouse. (Butler 54-55)

Epictetus (ca. AD 50-120), a Greek philosopher from Phrygia, commenting on the distinguishing nature of facial hair, writes in his Discourses 1.16.9-14: “Wherefore, we ought to preserve the signs which God has given; we ought not to throw them away; we ought not, so far as in us lies, to confuse the sexes which have been distinguished in this fashion” (Oldfather 111).

In Book 3 of The Instructor, Clement of Alexandria (AD 160-220) describes long, twisted locks of hair as “womanish ringlets,” and the style of shaving or cropping the hair as recommended for men (W. Wilson 317). In Roman Questions 14, Plutarch (ca. AD 50-125) states that “it is usual that men should poll their heads, and women keep their hair long” (Holland 23). Lucian (ca. AD 117-181), a Greek rhetorician who lived in Syria, Gaul and Greece, in his poem The Runaways 27, describes “a woman with her hair closely clipped in the Spartan style, boyish-looking and quite masculine” (Harmon 85).

Sign of Immoral Character

In his thirty-third Discourse (lines 51-52), the Greek philosopher Dio Chrysostom (AD 40-120) remarks that among those things which identify someone’s incontinence is the “style of hair

cut” (Cohoon and Crosby 3:321-23). A particular hairstyle was sometimes seen to be a sign of one’s involvement in such activities as harlotry, homosexuality, or adultery.

Harlotry. Charles Gulick, in Modern Traits in Old Greek Life, observes that in ancient Greece women customarily wore long hair and only the courtesan had her’s cut short (28). In his commentary on the Comedies of Aristophanes, Rogers states that a woman’s hair being cropped bowl-fashion “was an ignominious mode of tonsure, mostly reserved for slaves and harlots” (4:88). It is unclear whether prostitutes cut their hair intentionally or were compelled to do so, but either way it marked their ignoble reputation (cf. Grosheide 254).

Homosexuality. Lucian (ca. AD 117-81), in Dialogues of the Courtesans 289-91, writes about “a rich Lesbian woman” named Megilla, whose lover, Demonassa from Corinth, “revealed the skin of her head which was shaved close” (Macleod 379-83). Male homosexuals were known to have grown their hair long so they could arrange it like a woman’s (cf. Pausanias, Arcaidia 20; Juvenal, Satire 2; Philo, Special Laws 3.7.37).

Adultery. Again Lucian, in depicting the jealous husband of a woman who had “eyes for another man” and “another lover,” writes in Dialogues of the Courtesans 299: “If a man isn’t jealous or angry, Chrysis, and never hits you, cuts your hair off, or tears your clothes, is he still in love with you?” (Macleod 403). In The Runaways 27, Lucian also writes of the errant wife of a former host of his, whose hair was “closely clipped” (Harmon 53, 85). Tacitus (AD 55-118), describing the customs of ancient Germany in Germania 19, records: “Adultery in that populous nation is rare in the extreme, and punishment is summary and left to the husband. He shaves off his wife’s hair, strips her in the presence of kinsmen, thrusts her from his house and flogs her through the whole village” (Mattingly 116).

Humiliation and Disgrace

In Thesmophoriazusae 838, the Greek satirist Aristophanes (445-385 BC) states, “the mother of unworthy children should have her hair shorn” (Rogers 88-89). In the third century AD, Achilles Tatius, a Greek novelist, writes in The Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon 8.4-5: “She has been bought and sold, she has been a slave, she has dug the ground, she has been robbed of the crowning glory of her hair; you can still see where her head was shaved” (Gaselee 399). Regarding men, Dio Chrysostom (ca. AD 40-120), in Discourse 12.15; 35.2 and 72.2, observes that long hair was the badge of a philosopher, which often caused derision (Cohon and Crosby 1:19, 391-401; 5:177-79). See also Isa. 3.24; 15.2; Jer. 47.5; Ezek. 7.18; and Amos 8.10.

Pagan Ritualism

Euripides (ca. 479-406 BC), Lucian (ca. AD 117-181), Pausanias (AD 169), and others record the custom of maidens and young men cutting off their hair to honor Hippolytus, Apollo, Iphinoe, Hera, Artemis, the Fates, et al. (cf. Frazer 3:279-80). Courtesans, who had their hair cut short (Gulick 28; Rogers 4:88), participated in the prayers and sacrifices to Aphrodite in Corinth (Frazer 3:31).

Prayer or Worship Customs

Among the Greeks

A popular assertion is that the “Greeks remained bareheaded during prayer or sacrifice, as indeed they did in their ordinary outdoor life” (Vincent 246). The accuracy of this statement, however, is questionable since “the veil was not unknown in Greece. It was worn partly as adornment and partly on such special occasions as . . . the worship of chthonic deities (in the form of a garment drawn over the head)” (Kittel and Friedrich 3:562). Apuleius (AD 125 - ?), in Metamorphoses 11, describes a “holy procession” during the Isis festival at Corinth in which “the women’s hair was anointed and wrapped in a transparent [light linen] covering, while the men’s

heads were completely shaven and their skulls gleamed brightly -- earthly stars of the great religion” (Hanson 311).

Among the Romans

Another common assumption is that “among the Romans both sexes worshipped with covered heads” (Jackson 15; cf. Oster 260-64). This idea comes primarily from Virgil’s epic poem, The Aeneid. In this fictional work, Virgil (70-19 BC), a Roman poet from Italy, writes about the adventures of Aeneas, the illegitimate son of Venus and Anchises. In Book 3 (405 ff.) a seer of Apollo says to Aeneas: “Further, when your fleet has crossed the sea, and is moored, and you build your altar, and pay your vows on the shore, then veil your locks, and wrap yourself in purple cloak . . . This custom in religion let your comrades keep; do you yourself observe the same; to this holy form let your devout descendants ever be faithful” (Lonsdale and Lee 122-24).

In Roman Questions 10, Plutarch responds to the following query: “What is the cause that when they adore and worship the gods, they cover their heads: but contrariwise when they meet with any honourable or worshipful persons, if their heads haply were then covered with their cover, they discover the same, and are bare headed?” Plutarch’s answer, in part, is as follows: “if that which is reported of Aeneas be true . . . for this manner of being covered before the gods, is not properly respective unto them, but occasioned by accident, and hath, since that example of Aeneas, been observed and continued.” Plutarch goes on to explain in Roman Questions 11 and 13 that the gods Saturn and Honor were worshipped by the Romans bare-headed (Holland 18-22).

In the National Museum of Naples there are Roman cult paintings which “unquestionably represent religious ceremonies” (Goodenough 9:137). Volume 11 of Goodenough’s Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period shows a fresco from Pompeii (figure 118) in which a woman

(possibly a priestess) has her head covered with a himation. Figure 117 depicts the central figure, a priestess, with a himation covering her head, two males with no head-coverings, and a flute girl whose head appears to be uncovered. A vase painting (figure 218), with the scene of a corpse being crowned, shows the woman officiating the ceremony wearing a himation over her head. A man with a harp and a female slave holding an umbrella both have short hair and nothing covering their heads. Priests are represented in other paintings with uncovered heads (cf. Goodenough 9:137-38). If this evidence accurately portrays ancient worship practices among the Romans, one should be careful not to make broad statements about what “all” Romans did.

Among the Jews

It is frequently argued that it “was the custom of the Jews that they prayed not, unless their head [sic] were veiled, and that for this reason; that by this rite they might show themselves reverent, and ashamed before God, and unworthy with an open face to behold him” (Lightfoot 230-31). While this observation may have relevance to Jewish practices at some point in history, it is highly improbable that it portrays the true state of affairs in Paul’s day. Edersheim, who makes the same supposition, admits that the “practice of modern Jews is somewhat different than that of ancient times” (Sketches of Jewish Social Life 220 n. 1). The Jewish scholar Eugene Lipman observes that “the tzitzit, the ritual fringes, were not worn on a separate garment called a tallit as they are today” (206). The tallit, which was at one time a garment worn mostly by wealthy Jews and distinguished rabbis (Encyclopedia Judaica 15:743), came to be used as a prayer shawl sometime after the first century AD in response to the Christian mode of worship (Sigal 94-96, 259; cf. The Jewish Encyclopedia 2:532). There is no evidence that Jewish men in the first century AD worshipped or prayed with covered heads (cf. Buttrick 126; Barrett 250; Orr and Walther 259; Robertson and Plummer 229; et al.).

Conclusions About Relevant Customs

In order to establish a definite tradition, it is important to determine if there is a uniform testimony of many witnesses (Ferguson 258). While it may not be possible to be absolutely certain about the customs of Corinth in the mid-first century AD, the evidence in Paul's writings and the above information provide a reasonably clear picture. Apparently it was the general practice among nearly all cultures, especially Roman, Greek and Jewish, for respectable women to have long hair and to regularly keep their heads covered in public (cf. Grant and Kitzinger 3:1405). This was particularly expected of married women, in order to show their faithfulness to their husbands. Virgins and prostitutes, on the other hand, in trying to attract men, did not always follow this practice (cf. Hawthorne and Martin 585). Men ordinarily kept their hair short and did not routinely cover their heads. For a woman to have short hair or for a man to have long hair was generally considered inappropriate, for various reasons, and was often the cause of derision. Some pagan religious practices appear to have deviated from the normal standards of decency, but this was not as universal as is sometimes argued. Based on the foregoing conclusions, the discourse in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 seems to be consistent with the general social customs of the time.

Some will still argue that Paul's statements are innovative and in contrast to what was ordinarily practiced, especially among the Greeks. Oepke maintains that Greek women typically did not wear veils in public, and the evidence he cites includes an inscription of a cultic procession and representations of goddesses. He also mentions Helen depicted "with the upper part of her body uncovered, but with a veil" (Kittel and Friedrich 3:562). But how do these things show what was commonly practiced among the decent and respectable women of Greek society? Terry tries to show that Greek women were not allowed to cover their heads (7), quoting a statement

from Plutarch's Roman Questions 14. But Plutarch's comment is in the context of a Roman funeral at a pagan temple, which he deems "extraordinary" and "unusual," but is not representative of every-day life.

Again Terry argues that "the drawings on Grecian pottery show an absence of head coverings from a very early period," and he cites Hurley for support (8 n. 16). But instead of confirming Terry's argument, Hurley's article actually warns that this information is to be treated with caution since it is "decidedly pre-Christian" (194). Furthermore, Grant and Kitzinger explain:

But such evidence must be used with care, for there was a real distinction between the actual garment or fashion as worn and the artistic conventions with which it was represented in any particular period. The prevailing artistic style of a period affected the representation of clothing. There were also powerful traditions, some with religious roots, that governed the representation of gods and heroes, who were often represented with standard attributes including archaic dress. Moreover, artists sometimes copied other artistic representations, rather than real costumes drawn from life and familiar to them.

(3:1386)

Since the chief concern of this study is what was considered respectable and decent in ancient society, the depictions of pagan rituals, goddesses, prostitutes, and other immoral persons and acts are of little consequence. The abundant nude representations do not illustrate the true state of affairs in public life, and there are just as many portrayals of women with covered heads as there are of those without them (cf. Goodenough vol. 11). Conzelmann remarks: "That a head covering can be missing in these proves nothing in regard to appearance in public; but the wearing of a head covering certainly does prove something" (185 n. 40). In Jones, Sidwell, and Corrie's book Reading Greek: Text, there is a photograph of an ancient Greek sculpture depicting two

women, one fully clothed with a covering over her head and the other completely naked (123).

The caption reads, hê politis kai hê pornê, meaning “the female citizen and the prostitute.” There ought to be no debate over which description belongs to whom.

Literary Context

1 Corinthians 11.2-16 is just a small section of a larger literary unit. It forms part of a letter which was occasioned by special circumstances, and therefore must be viewed, not in isolation, but in relation to the whole document. David Alan Black observes: “A New Testament writing is not an accidental junk pile of miscellaneous elements. Instead it is like a jigsaw puzzle, where each piece fits into those that surround it, and where an isolated piece cannot make sense when removed from its proper place in the overall pattern. Seeing this pattern will keep you from distorting the parts that make up the whole” (95). It often proves helpful to outline an entire document to see how the distinct parts fit together. The epistle of 1 Corinthians may be concisely outlined as follows:²

- I. Introduction (1.1-9).
- II. Response to Reports (1.10 - 6.20).
- III. Response to the Corinthian Letter (7.1 - 16.12).
 - A. Marriage and Related Matters (7.1-40).
 - B. Limits of Exousia (“Liberty”): Food Sacrificed to Idols (8.1 - 11.1).
 - C. Woman’s Exousia and Covering the Head (11.2-16).³
 - D. Abuse of the Lord’s Supper (11.17-34).
 - E. Spiritual Gifts (12.1 - 14.40).
 - F. The Resurrection (15.1-58).
 - G. The Collection (16.1-11).

H. Apollos (16.12).

IV. Concluding Matters (16.13-24).

In trying to understand a biblical passage, the interpreter must be alert to what is said (content), how it is said (form), and in what situation it is said (life setting). Each of these factors is interconnected with the meaning of the text (Hayes and Holladay 83-84). Often the thought patterns and the important distinction between main points and secondary points in the original document cannot be clearly determined by the English structure and translation (Black 76-80). The key to unlocking some of these exegetical problems is found in the literary form of the passage. In the writings of Paul, various compositional techniques of the Greco-Roman world have frequently been incorporated. At times, therefore, the form itself can influence the way in which the composition should be interpreted (Fee, *N.T. Exegesis* 42-43). “How something is said is often as important as what is said. . . . The text’s design is part of its meaning, and to neglect this design is somewhat like covering a great cathedral with plywood siding” (Black 103).

One of the oldest academic disciplines is rhetoric, the purpose of which is to persuade an audience or reader of the validity of certain truths, positions, or courses of action. Rhetorical analysis is basically an attempt to clarify the meaning of a passage through a study of its literary and rhetorical dimensions (Black 76-80). By considering the structure of a text, one frequently discovers that the author has carefully constructed the passage in order to achieve maximum effect.

Quite often, ancient authors employed rhetorical techniques and devices within the text itself to assist in the comprehension of the message of the text and to persuade the hearer or reader of the truth of its presentation. . . . these rhetorical dimensions are often overlooked by the modern reader. Yet, they are extremely valuable to the exegete in

understanding the biblical writings. . . . the overall structure may be unfamiliar and incomprehensible to the modern reader because it does not easily fit into modern notions of sequence and organization; yet, it may fit perfectly into ancient notions of arrangement. A document may be perfectly symmetrical and logically sequential, provided one understands the rhetorical principle or principles upon which it was based. (Hayes and Holladay 74-80)

The literary skill of Paul is demonstrated as the rhetorical dimension of this section is closely examined. In 1 Cor. 11.2-16 the apostle appears to be employing a common literary device known as chiasmus, i.e. an inverted parallelism in which the center line receives the emphasis. This technique reveals the interrelationship between the individual lines of a text and calls attention to the centerpiece of the paragraph (Black 80-82). Failure to recognize this chiastic structure and its implications often contributes to the main point being overlooked and a number of faulty conclusions being drawn. The following outline shows the rhetorical composition of this passage:⁴

- A (2-3) Introduction
- B (4-7) woman, praying, uncovered head, man, glory
- C (8a) man is not out of woman
- D (8b) woman is out of man
- E (9a) man was not created for woman
- F (9b) woman was created for man
- X (10) woman ought to have authority over her head because of the angels
- F' (11a) woman is not without man
- E' (11b) man is not without woman

D' (12a) woman is out of the man

C' (12b) man is through the woman

B' (13-15) woman, praying, uncovered, man, glory

A' (16) Conclusion

While verse 10 is admittedly the most problematic verse in this paragraph, it appears to be the central point. What it means and how it relates to the other lines of argumentation is fundamental to understanding the whole passage. In chiasmic structure, the center is the turning point, and there is often a change in the trend of thought to an antithetic idea (Shoemaker 62). Bringing the corresponding components together reveals these contrasting parallels:⁵

A praise/remember me/I you (Corinth) retaining (divine) precepts

A' contentious. we churches of God no such (human) custom

B woman. . .praying. . .uncovered. . .disgrace. . .short hair. . .man's glory. (artificial covering)

B' woman. . .praying. . .uncovered. . .proper?. . .long hair. . .woman's glory. (natural covering)

C man not out of woman (creation)

C' man through woman (procreation)

D woman is out of man (creation)

D' woman is out of man (creation/procreation?)

E man not created for woman (physical creation)

E' man not without the woman (new creation)

F woman created for the man (physical creation)

F' woman not without the man (new creation)

As this passage is analyzed verse-by-verse, it is important to keep in mind its overall rhetorical framework. The full meaning of a discourse is realized only as the parts of the text interact with each other and relate to the whole. Black offers a fitting admonition: "Above all, never make a decision on the basis of what you would like the passage to say. Seek to be faithful to the way in which the Holy Spirit structured the original text" (103).

Exegesis of the Text

Verse 2: Now I am commending you because you remember all things of me and are retaining the precepts just as I delivered [them] to you.⁶

The particle de, which is one of the most commonly used Greek particles, is frequently left untranslated (cf. RSV, NRSV, NIV). However, as Green suggests, close attention to this particle in the numerous instances of its occurrence⁷ is indispensable (344). It marks “the superaddition of a clause, whether in opposition or in continuation, to what has preceded” (H. Moulton 85), although the contrast is often scarcely discernible (Bauer 171). This conjunctive particle may be variously rendered: “but, on the other hand, and, also, now, etc.” (H. Moulton 85). If its significance here is “and,” it would show a continuation of what Paul had just discussed in 10.32 - 11.1 (cf. Fee, 1 Cor. 499). It is also possible that de here is adversative, indicating an otherwise concealed antithesis: “but I praise you, even while I exhort . . .” (Green 344; cf. Hodge 205-206). However, the most probable function of de in this verse is to mark the transition to a new subject (Grosheide 248; cf. KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB).

Epainô, meaning “to praise, commend, applaud” (H. Moulton 149), is a present tense verb, indicating that the apostle’s praise is continuing as he writes. He is commending humas (“you” plural), i.e. those to whom he is writing. The Western and Majority Text traditions have added adelphoi, thus the King James and New King James versions read “brethren.” This word, however, appears to be an interpolation (Robertson and Plummer 229). Metzger reasons that if it were present originally (as at 10.1 and 12.1, where no witness omits it), its absence from so many reliable manuscripts would be inexplicable (Textual Commentary 495). Nevertheless, whether the word adelphoi is in the text or not, the meaning is unaffected. This statement of praise is directed to “God’s called-out people in Corinth” (1.2).

Paul commends these brethren hoti (“because” or “in that”) they remembered him and his teachings. The verb mimnêskomai carries the idea of “remind oneself, recall to mind, remember . . . keep in mind” (Bauer 522). This perfect tense verb, the sense of which is a durative present (Robertson, Grammar 881), is directed entirely to the present resulting state (Burton 37). These brethren were in a state of remembering Paul “in all things” (ASV), or “in all respects” (Moule 35), or “in every connection” (Blass and Debrunner 85). As “regards all matters” they were thinking of him and of what he had taught them (Lenski 430).

Another reason for Paul’s commendation is katechete (“you are retaining”). This verb is the second person plural of katechô, meaning “hold fast, retain faithfully” (Bauer 423). The present tense signifies, “you continue to hold fast” (McCord). The direct object is paradoseis, literally meaning “handing down or over” (Bauer 615), and in this text it connotes “what is transmitted (in the way of teaching), precept, doctrine . . . traditional law” (H. Moulton 302). The word is used with reference to “the gospel as a clearly delimited authoritative tradition” (Ridderbos 240). These “traditions” (NKJV), or “ordinances” (KJV), or “teachings” (NIV) had been handed down to them by Paul’s personal instruction (3.2), in a previous letter (5.9), and/or through a personal representative (4.17).

The apostle certainly had little praise for them prior to this section, and his statement here is in direct contrast to what he goes on to write in verses 17 and 22: “I am not commending you . . . I do not commend you in this.” Some consider Paul’s “praise” to be words of irony or sarcasm (cf. Buttrick 124). But comparing this statement to his sincere refusal of praise in the next section demands that verse 3 be taken with equal sincerity (Hurley 192). Orr and Walther comment that “the matter now introduced would hardly be presented unless there were irregularities at Corinth . . . the word of praise will reassure those who have been conforming to apostolic traditions and

put in a receptive frame of mind those whose practices are irregular” (259). The strategy of commending one’s readers prior to correction seems to have been a common rhetorical practice (cf. Oster 254-55).

In all likelihood Paul is here quoting a statement from the letter they had sent him (cf. Bruce, Paul 264-65; Barrett 247). How else would he have been aware of their remembrance unless they or someone else had told him? Since the reports Paul had received from others were mostly negative, these words presumably originated with the Corinthians.

It is also probable that the discussion which follows these words of commendation was likewise motivated by information the apostle had received from Corinth. While other references to their questions typically begin with the introductory peri de (“Now concerning . . .”), Faw suggests that the de here is an abbreviated form of the peri de formula (221). Instead of being adversative, it introduces a new topic as in 7.8 and 15.1. Lenski, on the other hand, proposes that the absence here of peri may indicate that the Corinthians had made no formal inquiry, though the topic had probably been mentioned in their letter. “As the tenor of Paul’s instruction shows, this question regarding women had in all likelihood as yet not become so acute in Corinth as to prompt a direct inquiry to the apostle” (429). Nevertheless, this section has a number of the characteristics of Paul’s other responses. “He is systematic and calm. The topic is introduced without explanation. He seems to assume that the Corinthians will find his discussion relevant. He does not refer to any particular abuse in the past which he desires to correct . . .” (Hurd 90-91, cf. 182-83). Even though Paul is the author, it is important to appreciate the contribution of the Corinthians to the content of this epistle (Oster 19).

Verse 3: But I am desiring you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is head of woman, and God is head of Christ.

The particle de is left untranslated by McCord, but it is here almost certainly adversative to the previous verse (cf. KJV; NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, et al.). This could suggest that at least some things among the brethren are not to be commended. However, since the subsequent discourse lacks the intensity of much that has preceded, the more probable contrast is between the teaching they had already received and something new which the apostle is about to communicate (Ellingworth and Hatton 214). This is indicated by the phrase “I want you to know” (NKJV) or “understand” (NASB) or “realize” (NIV). He does not use the phrase, “You know . . .” (cf. 12.2; 16.15; et al.), or the rhetorical question, “Do you not know . . . ?” (cf. 5.6; 6.2-19; 9.13, 24; et al.). Neither does he rebuke them for having violated something which they had already been taught, as in verses 17-23. The only other time Paul uses this phrase is in Col. 2.1, where he appears to be sharing information with the Colosse saints of which they were formerly unaware.

What was it that Paul wanted the brethren at Corinth to know? It is most improbable that they were ignorant of the headship of Christ or of gender roles, since such is basic and fundamental to Christianity. As Hurley states, this “would have been accepted by all of the Corinthians” (202). Rather, what they apparently needed to be made aware of was the relationship between God’s hierarchical arrangement and social decorum. The phrase, “But I am desiring you to know,” introduces the whole section, not just the words of verse 3. The apostle does not set out to prove this headship doctrine, nor does it constitute his main theme. Paul is merely stating the basic theological principle upon which his practical instructions are based (Thrall, 1 and 2 Cor. 79).

The term kephalê (“head”) is used nine times in this section, appearing to be a significant indicator of the main issue under consideration. There is at least one head-related question (i.e. head-covering) with which Paul is dealing, and the alternation between the literal and the metaphorical use of the term explains his position (Oster 258). The meaning of kephalê in its

physical, anatomical sense is not in dispute. In the past few decades, however, the implication of this word as it is used figuratively has been the topic of much debate. The two basic positions are that the metaphorical sense of kephalê is either (1) “source” or (2) “authority over.” Is the emphasis of the word in this verse that man is the source of woman’s being, or that he is in a position of authority over her? A number of scholars deny that man has any kind of authority over the woman.

Among those advocating “source” or “origin” as a justifiable interpretation of kephalê are Bruce (Paul 420 n. 45), Brown (160), Fee (1 Cor. 502-503), Barrett (248), Hawthorne and Martin (376-77), Scroggs (“Eschatological Woman: Revisited” 534-35), and Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphey (808). The evidence most often cited in defense of this view is Stephen Bedale’s essay, “The Meaning of Kephalê in the Pauline Epistles,” published in the October 1954 issue of The Journal of Theological Studies (211-15). In this article Bedale maintains that kephalê means “source” in 1 Cor. 11.3, Eph. 4.15, and Col. 2.19. He bases his conclusion on the following three arguments: (1) “In normal Greek usage, classical or contemporary, kephalê does not signify ‘head’ in the sense of ruler, or chieftain, of a community” (211); (2) The idea that the head controls the body “would be unintelligible to St. Paul or his readers” (212); and (3) “It seems a fair inference that St. Paul, when using kephalê in any but its literal sense, would have in mind the enlarged and metaphorical uses of the term ‘head’ familiar to him from the Old Testament: and these, as we have seen, include the meaning of the ‘beginning’ of something” (213).

A major problem with these conclusions, which have been accepted as “fact” by several scholars, is that Bedale gives no evidence to confirm the first two points. In support of his third argument, he lists examples in the Septuagint where kephalê and archê are both used to translate the Hebrew word rô’sh, but he fails to cite a single text to demonstrate that kephalê was ever

used in the sense of “source” or “origin” (Grudem, “Does Kephalê?” 41-43).

The only other evidences which seem to support this idea are quotations from Herodotus and the Orphic Fragments. Herodotus died in 425 BC, and while the dates and authors of the Orphic Fragments are unknown, Plato, who died in 347 BC, was the first to quote verses from them (Hammond and Schullard 758-59). Before these texts are considered, it is appropriate to question the validity of establishing a word’s meaning on two unrelated sources which are about five centuries older than the writings of Paul.

In the Preface to his Greek-English lexicon, Edward Robinson traces the progress of the Greek language through three great periods: its youth (which includes Herodotus), its prime (Attic), and its decline (after the Macedonian conquest, and still later under the Roman dominion). Robinson observes that in this latter period circumstances produced “great changes in the language,” which eventually led to the later Greek idiom hê koinê dialektos, “the common language” (v; cf. Bauer xi - xxi; Machen 1-6). It is generally understood that the Greek language progressively underwent a significant transformation, so the Greek spoken by Herodotus and that spoken by Paul were by no means identical. For those advocating “source” as the meaning of kephalê, Herodotus fails to provide a very strong case.

In his History 4.91, Herodotus records the following inscription of Darius: “From the sources of the river Tearus flows the best and fairest of all river waters . . .” (Godley 293). The word translated “sources” is kephalai (plural of kephalê). According to Liddell and Scott, kephalê refers to the source of a river only in the plural (citing Herodotus 4.91), but in the singular it means “mouth” of a river; and the general category under which this definition is listed is “of things,” meaning “extremity” (945). Both ends or extremities of a river (head and mouth) may have, at one time, been described with the word kephalê, but the emphasis is on “end point”

rather than “origin.” It is difficult to see what bearing this has on the use of kephalê in the epistles of Paul, where the word is used neither in the plural nor with reference to things.

Does the appeal to the Orphic Fragments offer any better support? Grudem remarks that “one example of a word used in a fragmentary poem by an unknown author of unknown date 500 years or more before the time of the New Testament is probably the weakest possible evidence that one could imagine” (“Does Kephalê ?” 45). There are two fragments under consideration, and the problem is augmented by a textual variant. Fragment 21 contains the following: “Zeus is the beginning [archê], Zeus is the middle, and by Zeus everything is accomplished. Zeus is the foundation both of earth and of sparkling heaven” (Cervin 90). In comparison, Fragment 21 A reads: “Zeus is head [kephalê], Zeus the middle, and by Zeus everything is accomplished; Zeus is the foundation both of earth and of sparkling heaven” (Cervin 91). Some argue that the variant involving archê and kephalê “is especially significant in terms of its meaning” (Fee, 1 Cor. 503 n. 45; cf. Barrett 248), while others conclude, “this bit of evidence is somewhat weaker still: it is just one of two possible variant readings” (Grudem, “Does Kephalê ?” 45). Whatever the case may be, if kephalê was the original word used, it should be beneficial to determine its meaning in this text.

In discussing the secular use of kephalê, Schlier observes:

that it denotes what is first, supreme, or extreme But this leads us already to the second aspect, i.e., not merely what is first, or supreme, at the beginning or the end, but also what is “prominent,” “outstanding” or “determinative” When the idea of that which is determinative is linked with the point of departure kephalê can easily take on the sense of archê. (Kittel and Friedrich 3:673-74)

The word archê was used in a variety of senses, particularly of either (1) “beginning, origin,” or

(2) “first place or power, sovereignty” (Liddell and Scott 252; cf. H. Moulton 53-54). In the context presently under discussion, kephalê (or possibly archê) is used in connection with the middle and the accomplishment (or end) of everything. It is also stated in the previous line that “Zeus is first [prôtos], lightning-flashing Zeus is last” (Cervin 90-91). The context appears to indicate that kephalê (or archê) is used here in the sense of “beginning” (of a series) or “first one” (with reference to time). The idea of “source” is not even suggested in this text. Grudem comments: “I know of no other case in which a common New Testament word has been endowed with a new meaning on the basis of such evidence, and readers might well be forgiven for suspecting that an argument constructed on such a slim basis would be guilty of special pleading” (“Does Kephalê ?” 45; cf. Engberg-Pedersen, “1 Cor.” 681).

The standard lexicons of New Testament Greek almost unanimously define the figurative sense of kephalê: “of superior rank” (cf. Bauer 430; H. Moulton 229; Thayer 2778; Sophocles 662; E. Robinson 398; Newman 100; Cremer 354; et al.). It is significant that none of these authorities has listed “source” as even a possible meaning. Liddell and Scott do offer “source” as an option, but it is listed under the general heading “of things,” and the examples cited are Herodotus and the Orphic Fragment 21 A (945). Moreover, this reference work is the standard lexicon of “Classical Greek,” but not of the New Testament (Metzger, Lexical Aids 5). While Fitzmyer questions the sense of kephalê as “authority over” in early Greek writings, he agrees that this meaning “does begin to appear in Greek literature in the last pre-Christian centuries and at the beginning of the Christian era. Hence, there is little reason to doubt that a Hellenistic Jewish writer like Paul of Tarsus could have intended kephalê in I Corinthians 11:3 to have that meaning” (“Kephalê” 55).

The word kephalê appears eighteen times in the writings of Paul, and is attributed to him once

more in Acts 27.34. It is used metaphorically in the following passages: 1 Cor. 11.3 ff.; Eph. 1.22; 4.15; 5.23; and Col. 1.18; 2.10, 19. If “source” is the idea the apostle was intending to get across to his readers, his choice of the word kephalê is somewhat peculiar. The concept of “authority” fits well into the immediate contexts of each of these passages and is consistent with the rest of Scripture. God clearly did not make Christ the “source” of all things after his resurrection and exaltation (Eph. 1.22). It is sometimes argued that the idea of “source” fits into the contexts of some of these passages, e.g. Col. 1.18; 2.19; Eph. 4.15 (Bedale 212; Fee, 1 Cor. 504). But since these texts also support the concept of “authority,” the meaning of kephalê is not affected (cf. Schreiner, Recovering 128; Grudem, “A Response” 19). Paul is essentially saying in 1 Cor. 11.3 that “Christ has authority over all men as the man has authority over the woman and God over Christ” (Ellingworth and Hatton 214). [For further discussion on kephalê, see Appendix 1]

Christ is the head of every man.

When an article occurs with the subject and predicate nominative, both are definite and treated as identical and interchangeable (Robertson, Grammar 769). Therefore, hê kephalê ho Christos estin signifies that every man “has one head and that one head is only and always Christ” (Grosheide 249). The omission of the article would not have altered the meaning of this phrase, but would have weakened its expression (Buttmann 124-25).

What does Paul mean by “every man”? Andros, genitive singular of anêr, is variously used in the New Testament: of male in contrast to female (Acts 8.12; 17.12), adult male as distinguished from boy (Matt. 14.21; 1 Cor. 13.11), husband (Rom. 7.2; Tit. 1.6), human being (Luke 11.31), etc., but is common in all its meanings (Bauer 66-67; H. Moulton 29). Murphy-O’Connor suggests that anêr is used here generically, denoting “the human species” (“Sex and Logic” 498).

But since it stands in contrast to gunaikos (“woman”), its usage in this verse clearly signifies male as distinguished from female (Bauer 66).

What is not so evident is whether Paul is referring to every male universally (Lenski 433; Thrall, 1 and 2 Cor. 79) or more specifically to every Christian male (Martin 232; Hodge 207). While similar wording is used in verse 4, where “every man” is associated with Christian activity, the two statements are not identical. The nominative construction in verse 4 (pas anêr) is modified by “praying or prophesying,” whereas the genitive construction in verse 3 (pantos andros) is not. Moreover, Paul goes on to use the general expression ho anêr (“the man”) in verse 3, which, along with the unqualified “every man,” gives the impression that this is meant without limitation. Notwithstanding, Christ has ultimate authority over all men, whether Christian or not (Matt. 28.18; Eph. 1.22), and both interpretations are compatible with Paul’s argument.

The man is head of woman.

Christ is the head of man, whereas woman has another head in addition to Christ, namely man (Lenski 434).⁸ In contrast to the preceding clause, kephalê here has no article. This indicates that man is not the head of woman in quite the same sense as Christ is man’s head (Robertson, Grammar 781). It has been suggested that Paul is describing the relationship of husband and wife (Ridderbos 306; Schweitzer 9; cf. RSV; NRSV). While the terms anêr and gunê are sometimes used in this sense (e.g. Rom. 7.2; 1 Cor. 7.2, 3), and elsewhere Paul applies similar language to the marriage relationship (Eph. 5.22-33), in this passage he does not use such qualifiers as eautou (“of himself”), idios (“one’s own”), or hupandros (“married”). Although it may be difficult to determine with certainty, his statement appears to incorporate all men and women, regardless of marital status.

Schweitzer’s opinion, that because man stands nearer to God than woman does, she is

therefore inferior (9-10), is misdirected. Paul goes on to affirm in verses 11-12 that women and men are mutually dependent. Even though male headship implies female subordination (cf. Eph. 5.22 ff.), submission and inferiority are not equivalents. J. W. Shepherd rightly states: “Let it here be distinctly understood that the subordination thus expressed involves no degradation. As the church is not dishonored by being subject to Christ, so neither is woman dishonored by being subject to man” (Lipscomb 163).

God is head of Christ.

This statement must be understood in view of Christ’s incarnation. Jesus is equal to God in his divine nature, and only subordinate to God in his human nature (cf. John 1.1-14; Phil. 2.5-8; et al.). “It is the incarnate Son of God, who, in the great work of redemption, is said to be subordinate to the Father, whose will he came into the world to do” (Hodge 207). Again kephalê has no article, so God is not Christ’s head in the same sense that Christ is the head of man. Murphy-O’Connor takes the position that “Christ” in this statement designates the community of believers rather than the risen Lord (“Non-Pauline?” 617). This idea is based on the body concept of chapter 12, but referring to the church simply as “Christ” is obscure, misleading, and without precedence.

Paul is here speaking of the head in a metaphorical sense without the implied thought of a body belonging to it. The designation “head” has its own independent significance (Ridderbos 381). This hierarchical arrangement (God-Christ-man-woman) lays the groundwork for Paul’s discussion. While all three relationships are different, they correspond in that each, according to God’s design, has the feature of a head over one who is subordinate (Lenski 433-34). Having introduced this underlying principle, Paul goes on to make application to a problematic situation at Corinth.

Verse 4: Every man praying or prophesying having [something] down upon his head disgraces his head.

The Greek adjective pas (“every”), when used with a singular noun without the article, emphasizes “the individual members of the class denoted by the noun” (Bauer 631). The context, however, confines “every man” to every Christian man, and even more specifically to every Christian man “praying or prophesying.” Moreover, the context may limit this even further to every Christian man at Corinth praying or prophesying (1.2). When Paul refers to the contentiousness of “anyone” (tis) in verse 16, it is generally understood that he is considering anyone among the Corinthian brethren. Furthermore, in verse 2, when Paul mentions their remembrance in “all things” (panta, accusative plural neuter of pas), the restricted nature of this is evident.

The next question is whether Paul in this section is equally addressing the behavior of both men and women (Roetzel 2; Oster 263), or is he primarily concerned with only the women’s conduct (Buttrick 124; Hodge 207-208). Lenski is probably right in suggesting that Paul merely mentions the hypothetical situation of men in order to bring out the contrast with the women (438; cf. Meier 218; Robertson and Plummer 229). “[T]here is a tendency for each stage of the argument to end with a mention of women, suggesting that they are at present Paul’s main concern” (Ellingworth and Hatton 211-12). Had there been a real problem with the men, it seems that Paul would have had more to say about it (Alford 564).

The present participles proseuchomenos (“praying”) and prophêteuôn (“prophesying”) indicate the continuous or repeated actions of the man speaking to and from God. Oster proposes that these acts are related to the pagan rituals of the Romans (261-64), but since these words are not modified here and are used again in chapters 13-14, Christian activity is obviously what Paul has

in mind. Praying is generally understood simply as the act of communicating to God. To prophesy (cf. 14.1 ff.) means to “proclaim a divine revelation” (Bauer 723), though this gift was not conferred upon everyone (12.10, 28; cf. Ellis, Paul’s Use of O.T. 109). While both praying and prophesying were part of the worship assembly (cf. 14.1-40), they were by no means restricted to it. Praying was done individually in private (Matt. 6.6), individually in public (Luke 18.10-13), collectively in small groups (Acts 12.12; 20.36), and individually in the presence of both believers (Luke 11.1; 22.39-41) and unbelievers (Acts 27:35). Prophesying took place at special gatherings (Acts 15.30-32), at informal settings (Acts 21.10-11), and in the presence of individuals (Acts 24.25), small groups (Acts 19.6), crowds (Luke 2.3 ff.), believers (1 Cor. 14.22), and unbelievers (1 Cor. 14.24; Rev. 10.11). Since prophesying was not done individually in private, the idea of praying here may be that of public prayer, in the presence of and to the edification of others (Grosheide 251; Ridderbos 461).

The preposition kata with the genitive denotes “down (from or upon)” (Brown 3:1198-99), but the precise definition of this general sense must be determined by the context. In the phrase kata kephalês echôn, literally “hanging down from the head, on the head” (Blass and Debrunner 120), there is no object. Buttmann observes that objects are sometimes omitted because they are easily supplied from the context, and suggests that kalumma (“a covering”) is probably the intended object here (145-46). Paul’s statement appears to be a reference to a covering down upon the head (Moule 60), or a veil hanging down from the head (Green 248). [For further discussion on the nature of the covering, see Appendix 2]

Evidently it was considered a dishonorable thing for a man to have something over his head while engaged in the Christian activities of praying or prophesying. The present tense of kataischunô (“disgraces”) shows that the shame continues as long as the activity continues. Since

Paul seems to be using a play on words, what does he mean by the “head” which is dishonored? Is it the man’s metaphorical head -- Christ (Morris 152; Bratcher 104), or his literal head -- representing himself (Oster 264; Hodge 208), or both (Barrett 250; Meier 218)?

If “head” here is a reference to Christ, the purpose of verse 3 would appear to be more obvious. On the other hand, it seems natural to equate the dishonored “head” with the literal sense of “down upon the head” in the same statement. Lenski affirms the latter because the second kephalê in verse 4 “has the article of previous reference” (438). Furthermore, Paul goes on to mention (v. 14) that long hair on a man is a dishonor autô (“to him”). Schlier lists numerous examples in secular writings where kephalê is used for the “whole man” or “person” (Kittel and Friedrich 3:674; cf. Fitzmyer, “Kephalê” 53). See also Ps. 7.16; Prov. 10.6; 11.26; Acts 18.6; 27.34; Rom. 12.20.

It still must be admitted that the symbolism of kephalê as Paul uses it in this verse is unclear, and the original recipients of his letter probably sensed the same ambiguity. It may very well be that Paul’s purpose was an intentional double meaning (cf. Hurley 202; Waltke 51). For a man to dress or act inappropriately would certainly cause disgrace to himself, and to do so while engaged in religious activities would bring dishonor to his spiritual leader as well. Ellingworth and Hatton suggest the following rendering: “dishonors Christ and himself” (215).

Verse 5: But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered is disgracing her head; for she is one and the same [thing] as the one having been shaved.

The particle de is clearly adversative to the preceding statement. Paul is contrasting the hypothetical situation of men with the more likely case of women. “Every woman” (pasa gunê) is limited by the context to every Christian woman, and possibly even further to every Christian woman at Corinth (cf. v. 4). The participles proseuchomenê (“praying”) and prophêteuouosa

(“prophesying”) are identical, except for gender, to those ascribed to “every man” in the previous verse. Whatever men were said to be doing in verse 4, the same is attributed to women here.

One of the more prevalent inferences among commentators is that the corporate worship assembly is the setting being considered in this text (cf. Oster 253-54; Barrett 246; et al.). This view has led many to conclude that Paul is here permitting women to participate in leading public worship (cf. Pagels 543; Waltke 49; Bratcher 140; et al.). It is argued that in this passage women are shown to be equal to male leaders and can therefore preach and pray publicly (Scroggs, “Eschatological Woman: Revisited” 533-34). But this conclusion is incompatible with Paul’s admonition in 14.34-35, which forbids women to speak in the assemblies.

Various attempts have been made to explain this apparent discrepancy. Charles Hodge writes: “He is here speaking of the propriety of women speaking in public unveiled, and therefore he says nothing about the propriety of their speaking in public itself. When that subject comes up, he expresses his judgment in the clearest terms, 14:34. In here disapproving of the one, says Calvin, he does not approve of the other” (208-209; cf. Alford 564). While this explanation may sound plausible, it is less than convincing. It makes no sense for Paul to have wasted time, energy, and ink regulating a practice which in itself he considered to be shameful, and which he would go on to forbid three chapters later.

Wayne Jackson suggests that “praying and prophesying” represent the totality of worship-acts in which the assembled church engages, and that “prophesying” in this context includes singing or other non-miraculous forms of admonishing (3-13). The problem with this interpretation is that it lacks scriptural precedence. Neither praying nor prophesying are limited in the New Testament to the public worship assemblies (cf. Acts 16.25; 21.10-11). The act of prophesying means to “proclaim a divine revelation” (Bauer 723), and is never used as a synonym for singing or for any

other non-miraculous, corporate activity.

James Hurley is of the opinion that 11.2 ff. grants women the right to exercise their gifts of prayer and prophecy in the assembly, and that 14.34-35 only forbids them to judge the prophecies of others (190-220; cf. K. Wilson 449-50). Against this view is the fact that nothing in 14.34-35 even hints at such an idea. The text implies the failure of these women to understand, but not that they may have been judging. While Paul does mention the discerning of prophecies in verse 29, he is clearly on another topic when he gets to verse 34. Moreover, why would the apostle allow a woman to teach through prophetic utterances, yet prohibit her from teaching through prophetic discernment? (Fee, 1 Cor. 704). In light of 14.27-29, the admonition, “let the women be silent in the congregations, for they are not allowed to speak,” is a prohibition against addressing the corporate assembly (cf. Workman 38-39; Highers 22-26). Ellingworth and Hatton render this phrase, “they must not hold positions of leadership” (285).

A number of scholars are maintaining that 11.2-16 and 14.34-35 blatantly contradict one another, and that there is no adequate way to harmonize the two (cf. Scroggs, “Eschatological Woman” 284). It has therefore been proposed that 14.34-35 is a post-Pauline interpolation (cf. Barrett 330-33; Schweizer 402; Fee, 1 Cor. 699-705). Some extend this to verses 33b-36 (cf. Veitch 63; Conzelmann 246), but they do so without any textual warrant. Arguments in favor of this view include the following: (1) Verses 34-35 are transposed to the end of 14.40 in some manuscripts. (2) These verses break the immediate context of chapter 14, which concerns the regulation of prophetic activity in the assemblies. (3) The appeal to the law as authority in verse 34 sounds un-Pauline. (4) The idea expressed is very similar to 1 Tim. 2.11-12, which is considered by many as a post-Pauline gloss (Walker 95 n. 6; Scroggs, “Eschatological Woman” 284).

Osburn has rightly observed: “All theories of interpolation look suspiciously like attempts to liberate Paul in terms of modern agendas” (223). Since these verses are found in all known manuscripts, in order for this theory to be credible the interpolation would have had to occur before Paul’s letters were widely circulated (Meeks 220 n. 108). But there is no evidence which suggests that the passage in question was ever considered inauthentic by its early recipients.

The transposition of these verses in a small group of manuscripts is the only textual issue. No extant manuscript has omitted these verses, and the few erratic ones which have them at the end of the chapter carry little significance. Whitely suggests that later scribes probably transposed the verses to avoid interrupting the flow of thought between verses 33 and 36 (224), although verse 36 still does not smoothly connect to verse 33 (Meeks 220 n. 108). Shifting these verses to follow verse 40 places them under the discussion of order in the church rather than prophecy, which would explain the reasoning of later scribes, but it is hard to provide any rationale for the reverse transposition (Hurley 216).

While the content of verses 34-35 may appear to intrude on the discussion at hand, this is insufficient reason to consider it non-Pauline. Gary Workman remarks:

It is difficult to understand why someone would think it strange for Paul to deal with another item of disorderliness regarding speakers in the assembly in the course of dealing with abuses of spiritual gifts, especially since he was discussing speakers themselves. How many could speak, how they were to go about it, etc. [sic] Qualifying the gender of the speakers would be a natural element of such a discussion if there is a divine restriction about it, and Paul shows us that there is. (36)

There is little justification for modern interpreters trying to impose their own expectations and preferences on to the apostle. The attempt to determine how the inspired writer “should have”

treated certain issues is presumptuous. “Moreover, since Paul’s strategy toward the end of ch[apter] 14 has shifted from demanding intelligibility to demanding an orderly demeanor, his critique of certain women on this basis is not so out of step with the surrounding context” (Oster 354).

The appeal to the law in verse 34 is no more un-Pauline than Paul’s appeal to the essence of the law in Romans 12.19 (Whiteley 224). But the law mentioned in this text is probably the law of creation, as stated in Genesis 2.21-24, and/or the subsequent law of Genesis 3.16 (Ridderbos 462; Workman 38).

That the instruction of 1 Cor. 14.34-35 is similar to that of 1 Tim. 2.11-12, instead of calling these passages into question, may very well indicate the authenticity of both. The burden of proof rests with those who challenge Pauline authorship, and if objections can be satisfactorily answered in agreement with the self-claims of the texts, the authenticity may be regarded as established (Guthrie, N.T. Introduction 596). In terms of textual criticism there is not the slightest ground for this interpolation theory (Ridderbos 461).

The principal consideration is whether or not the contents of 1 Cor. 11.2-16 and 14.34-35 actually constitute a “blatant contradiction.” Goguel acknowledges that if it could be proven that 11.2-16 is concerned with prayer and prophecy in public worship, there would appear to be a contradiction. But there is nothing to compel one to reach this conclusion (551). If the texts are dealing with different circumstances, any discrepancy between the two is more apparent than real. Even though the majority opinion is that both passages are dealing with the limited environment of a worship assembly, this deduction is by no means universal (cf. Lightfoot 232; Schweizer 401; Lenski 437; Grosheide 252; Ridderbos 462; McGuiggan 221-35; et al.).

The original text of 1 Corinthians had no chapter or verse divisions, and certainly no chapter

headings, like “The Christian Assembly” (Barrett 246) or “The Behavior of Women in Public Worship” (Bratcher 108). What is recognized today as chapter 11 could just as easily have been started at 10.14, 10.23, 11.2, 11.3, or 11.17, but it is almost unanimously agreed that it was a mistake to mark the beginning of the chapter at 11.1 (cf. Dummelow 909; Hodge 204; et al.). Since a Christian assembly is not mentioned until 11.17-18, there is no legitimate reason to reverse this context to incorporate the previous discussion. Moreover, the contrasting statements of praise in verse 2 and of rebuke in verse 17 clearly demonstrate that Paul is beginning a new section at verse 17.

Instead of specifying a particular setting in 11.2-16, Paul merely identifies the activities of praying and prophesying. “It is quite essential to note that no modifier is attached to the participles to denote a place where these activities were exercised. So we on our part should not introduce one . . .” (Lenski 436). Just because “praying and prophesying” are mentioned together in the same context does not restrict the setting to a corporate worship assembly (cf. 1 Thess. 5.16-20).

In the church of the first century AD, women, as well as men, were endowed with the miraculous gift of prophecy (Acts 2.17; 21.9). They were expected to be teachers (Tit. 2.3-4) and workers in the Christian community (Rom. 16.1; Phil. 4.2-3). It stands to reason that if God had given these gifts and responsibilities to women, he would have expected them to be utilized. At the same time, however, there were certain restrictions placed upon Christian women. They were not permitted to teach or to have authority over a man (1 Tim. 2.11-12), nor were they allowed to speak as to lead the public assembly (1 Cor. 14.34-35).

Since the women in 1 Cor. 11.2-16 are mentioned as praying and prophesying the same as men, and only men are authorized to lead in the gatherings of the church (1 Cor. 14), the only

sensible conclusion is that Paul is not limiting his instructions in 11.2-16 to the corporate assembly. In context, Paul had been discussing a Christian's influence "in all things" -- social and religious, toward both believers and unbelievers (8.1 - 11.1). There are several points of contact between this section and the previous one (cf. Ellingworth and Hatton 211). Notice that in 11.2-16 Paul does not use the words "come together" (11.17), "when you assemble in a congregation" (11.18), "come together in the same place" (11.20), "the whole congregation has come together" (14.23), or "you come together" (14.26). Because no particular setting is specified in 11.2-16, these instructions would apply generally to any situation in which praying or prophesying was done.

One of the main objections to the above conclusion is the following: ". . . had there been no men present (1 Cor. 11.4) when these sisters were praying and prophesying, this issue would not have even arisen for Paul to correct" (Oster 265). Those who make this argument presume that in gatherings restricted to females (e.g. Acts 16.13), the emblems of modesty and decorum were typically discarded. This, however, is a baseless assumption.

With Her Head Uncovered.

The word akatakaluptô ("uncovered") does not inherently reveal that which covered the head before it became uncovered. Some argue that the covering under consideration here is the natural covering of hair (cf. v. 15), and to be "uncovered" means to have the hair removed (cf. Martin 233; Coffman 176-79; Woodward 75-81). This interpretation, however, is improbable considering Paul's argument in verse 6. It would be senseless for him to have said that if a woman's head is not covered (with hair), let her kai ("also") have her hair cut off. Both internal and external evidences build a strong case for the artificial head-dress as the primary covering being discussed in this passage. [For further discussion on the nature and style of the covering,

see Appendix 2].

The adjective akatakaluptô is a dative of manner (Young 50-51), which means that it is expressive of the method by means of which an act is performed (Dana and Mantey 90). The English word “with” is used in the translation, not in the sense of “in company with,” but in the sense of “by means of” (Machen 60-61). Paul discourages the Christian ladies at Corinth from praying or prophesying by means of an uncovered head. It may be that the removal of the head-covering would have caused a woman to appear as though she were claiming equal status with the male leaders. The apparent controversy unlikely involved all the women, but only those who were taking part in these designated activities.

Were these Christian ladies actually removing their head-dresses while engaged in religious service? Hurd believes that such “a piling up of arguments is evidence that Paul was not weighing a theoretical problem” (189; cf. Grosheide 253). The idea has been proposed that either pagan customs were being brought into the church or there was a strong emancipation movement among the Corinthian women (Hurd 281-82; Wenham 235-47). However, nothing in Paul’s discussion warrants these suppositions. Since the church met in private homes (Rom. 16.23), and head-coverings were not typically worn at home (cf. Clement of Alexandria 3.12), confusion over this matter is understandable. This especially would have raised legitimate questions in regard to all-female gatherings. It appears from the admonition in verse 16 that a few contentious voices had been raised in Corinth, either questioning the necessity of the women covering their heads or advocating that they leave them uncovered.⁹ Hawthorne and Martin suggest that it was the upper-class women, whose family homes hosted church meetings, who may have instigated the controversy (585; cf. Theissen 69-174). This does not mean, however, that any of the ladies were in fact discarding their head-coverings. The main question for them was why this custom should

be observed, and Paul goes on to give sufficient reasons (Lenski 429-32).

Is Disgracing Her Head.

The matter again arises as to which “head” is being dishonored. Is it her husband (Bratcher 104), males in general (Oster 265), or herself (Lenski 438)? The connecting word gar (“for”) following the second occurrence of kephalê shows a link between the literal head that is shaved and the dishonoring of one’s (literal) head (cf. Barrett 251). The uncovered head manifests the indecency, thus Paul speaks about the shame resting on the head (Lenski 438; Robertson and Plummer 230). The Nestle-Aland Greek text cites some manuscript evidence for the alternate reading heautês, which would emphasize her “own” head rather than another person (cf. Hodge 209). On the other hand, since the disgrace is equated with “praying or prophesying,” there seems to be more involved than just the woman herself. It is possible that a woman’s husband, father, or Christian brothers would have also been shamed by such actions. As in the previous verse, a double meaning may very well have been intended (cf. K. Wilson 448; Engberg-Pedersen, “1 Cor.” 682).

For She is One and the Same as the One Having Been Shaved.

The word estin can be translated either “it is” or “she is.” Alford affirms the latter (565; cf. NASB). The only question this raises is whether the emphasis should be on the uncovered woman herself, or on the state of being uncovered. The gender of to auto (“the same”), a word of identity, is neuter because reference is being made to the general concept (Hanna 303). Emphasis is less on the individual than on some outstanding general quality (J. Moulton, Grammar 3:21). The participle exurêmenê, from xuraô meaning “to shave,” is used as an instrumental dative (Perschbacher, Practical Helps 646). An uncovered woman is “the same thing with the woman who has been shaved” (Robertson and Davis 240), i.e. “identical in meaning but not in

person” (Blass and Debrunner 73). The use of the article with this participle (tê exurêmenê) indicates the existence of a specific class to whom this designation may have been applied (Martin 234). “The shaved woman” is probably a reference to one disgraced either for some scandalous offense, or out of bravado (Robertson and Plummer 230). As discussed in chapter 2 of this study, shorn hair on a woman in Paul’s day was associated with such improprieties as heathen superstition, immorality, and confusing the sexes.

Paul is not formulating a rule that women must cover their heads. His point is that a woman, who ordinarily has her head covered in public, should also cover her head while praying or prophesying (Grosheide 253). The “Gospel had difficulties enough to contend against without shocking people by breaches of usage” (Robertson and Plummer 231).

Verse 6: For if a woman is not being covered, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is dishonorable to a woman to have her hair cut or to be shaved, let her continue to have her [head] covered.

Two contrasting conditions, introduced respectively by ei gar (“for if”) and ei de (“but if”), reinforce the argument in verse 5 (Ellingworth and Hatton 216). The negated present tense verb, ou katakaluptetai, indicates the continuous action or “normal habit” (Alford 565) of one who is not being covered. There is some confusion, however, whether the “voice” of this verb is middle (Brooks and Winbery 102) or passive (H. Moulton 215). If it is passive, Paul would simply be saying that she is not being covered (cf. KJV, NKJV, ASV). On the other hand, the middle voice would express her own action (Robertson and Plummer 231), and the sense would be that she is not covering herself (cf. NASB, RSV, NRSV, NIV). Mounce recommends that if in doubt, one should assume it is passive (224-26).

Because katakaluptetai is in the indicative mood, i.e. “the mood of reality,” Ralph Martin

argues that “this state of things was actually occurring” (234). What Martin fails to acknowledge, however, is Paul’s use of the particle ei (“if”), which clearly makes this a conditional statement. The use of ei to lead to a logical deduction is common in Paul’s writings (Hanna 303). Moreover, the indicative mood is the condition of supposed reality (Robertson, Grammar 1011), not necessarily of actual events. Paul is merely stating that if a thing happens to occur, then consistency should follow.

Let Her Also Have Her Hair Cut Off.

Since there is no equivalent to the third person imperative in English, it is difficult to translate and must therefore be somewhat idiomatic (Mounce 303). The typical rendering is “let her . . .” (cf. KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB), but the precise nuance must be determined by its use in the sentence (Brooks and Winbery 116-17). Some translators employ the expression “she should . . .” (cf. RSV, NRSV, NIV). The verb keirasthō, aorist imperative of keirō meaning “to cut one’s hair or have one’s hair cut” (Bauer 427), is used here as a permissive middle (Dana and Mantey 160). Nigel Turner argues that it is intransitive active in meaning and should therefore be rendered “cut her hair” (J. Moulton, Grammar 3:57; cf. RSV, NRSV). However, as Robert Hanna affirms, if the middle voice can be translated as such with valid sense, an active meaning should not be forced upon it. Paul seems to be saying that the uncovered woman “should allow her hair to be cut off” (303).

The point is made by way of irony and analogy. “If the latter is shameful, so too is the former” (Fee 1 Cor. 5:12). It is significant that kai (“also”) appears in this statement, which is often overlooked by those advocating “hair” as the only covering in this passage (cf. Coffman 172; Martin 239; et al.). The word is used here as a cumulative particle (H. Moulton 208) to show that the removal of hair is “in addition to” the uncovered head. While being “uncovered” and having

“the hair cut off” are comparable, they are clearly not identical.

But if it is Dishonorable to a Woman to Have Her Hair Cut or to be Shaved.

The adjective aischron carries the idea of “ugly, shameful, base” (Bauer 25); “indecorous, indecent, dishonorable, vile” (H. Moulton 10). It is the same word used in 14.35 to describe the actions of a woman who addresses the assembly. The aorist infinitive keirasthai is either a causal or permissive middle (Peschbacher, Practical Helps 646), i.e. she is either cutting the hair herself or simply allowing it to be cut. It is unlikely that this simply refers to “a regular trimming of her hair” (Ellingworth and Hatton 216). The shame attached to it seems to involve the cropping of the hair.

The infinitive xurasthai, from xuraô meaning “to shave,” is difficult to conjugate. Is it present or aorist tense, middle or passive voice? Lenski says it is aorist (439), while H. Moulton labels it present (281). Robertson and Plummer call it middle (231), yet Peschbacher says it is passive (Practical Helps 646). Friberg and Friberg admit that it can be either aorist or present, middle or passive (532). Bauer explains that it appears to be marked as a verbal form of xuraô by exurêmenê in the previous verse, and in that case it should be accented as a present infinitive. On the other hand, the near proximity of the aorist infinitive keirasthai makes it much more likely to be an aorist (549). Since it is generally agreed that keirasthai is middle voice, xurasthai is probably middle as well. These questions basically concern whether the dishonor results from the woman being shaved (forcibly) or allowing herself to be shaved (defiantly). Either way, the general opinion was obviously against the woman having little or no hair. The disgrace would have been brought about by both the appearance and the circumstances. “Moral disgrace and physical disgrace are here not strictly distinguished” (Daube 301-302).

Let Her Continue to Have Her Head Covered.

Katakaluptesthō, from katakaluptō (“to cover”), is a present imperative. The present imperative gives “a command to do something constantly, to continue to do it.” The context determines how much stress the imperative mood carries, though the present imperative is far less pressing than the aorist (J. Moulton, Grammar 1:172-73; 3:74-75). It is important to note that the imperative “is by no means confined to commands, but also expresses a request or a concession” (Blass and Debrunner 195). The question again arises whether this verb is middle (Brooks and Winbery 102) or passive (H. Moulton 215). Perschbacher labels it middle in his New Testament Greek Syntax (353), and passive in Refresh Your Greek: Practical Helps for Reading the New Testament (646). Whichever was intended by Paul, the Christian woman at Corinth was to have something covering her head continually. At whatever times it was considered indecorous for a woman to have short hair or to be shaved, a respectable woman was to have her head covered as often.

No particular reference is being made here to praying or prophesying; Paul is speaking in general. This shows even more clearly that public worship is not exclusively what the apostle has in mind. While dishonoring her “head” was a consequence of being unveiled at the times she was praying or prophesying (v. 5), the present imperative of this verse involves the ongoing, habitual covering of the head. Paul’s argument appears to be: that which a woman is expected to do under general circumstances, she should also do when she prays or prophecies. It was shameful for a woman to have her head uncovered in public, so the apostle is appealing to common sense (Grosheide 254).

Verse 7: For indeed a man is not obliged to be covered continually, being the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.

The conjunction gar (“for”) probably does not refer back to verse 5a, as suggested by

Ellingworth and Hatton (217), since the connection is so remote. It more likely relates to and gives a reason for katakaluptesthō in the previous verse. The difference between the sexes is assumed, that the woman's head should be covered and not the man's (Alford 565). The combination of the words men gar . . . de ("For indeed . . . but") carries the idea, "to be sure . . . but," or "on the one hand . . . on the other hand" (Bauer 502). This reason for the man not being covered is less than clear, especially since Paul offers no further explanation. It appears that for a man to habitually wear a head-covering would in some way obscure or diminish the image and glory of God which he reflects (Barrett 252).

The word translated "ought" (KJV, ASV, NIV, et al.) is opheilei, third person singular of opheilō, meaning "to be bound or obliged by what is due or fitting or consequently necessary" (H. Moulton 296). Thayer observes that this verb is used "of a necessity imposed either by law and duty, or by reason, or by the times, or by the nature of the matter under consideration" (469). With a negative the significance of this word can be one of two ideas: either "bound not to" (i.e. morally obligated not to do something), or "not bound to" (i.e. under no obligation to do something). The only other time opheilō occurs with a negative in Paul's extant correspondence to Corinth is 2 Cor. 12.14. Here almost identical wording is used (ou gar ophilei), where there is no obligation to do a certain thing rather than an obligation not to do it. Paul seems to be saying in 1 Cor. 11.7 that a man is not duty-bound to have his head covered. A valid observation is made by Ellingworth and Hatton on this point: "The general trend of Paul's thought suggests that he is primarily concerned with women's obligation to wear a head covering, an obligation which does not apply to men. He is therefore not primarily concerned with any obligations which men may have" (217; cf. Grosheide 255).

The voice of katakaluptesthai ("to be covered") is either passive (H. Moulton 215) or middle

(Friberg and Friberg 532), the difference being whether a man is passively being covered (ASV; NASB; NRSV) or covering himself (KJV; NKJV; RSV). That the word is a present tense infinitive is more certain. “The present infinitive refers to the action in its continuance or as repeated” (Machen 137). This verse is not saying that a man is to never have his head covered, but rather he is not bound to continually or habitually have it covered. This is just the opposite of what is expected of a woman in verse 6.

Being the Image and Glory of God.

This phrase is the ground for the preceding statement. The participle huparchôn is a form of the verb huparchô, which has various shades of meaning, including: to begin, to be, to be in possession, to belong (H. Moulton 414). Robertson and Plummer render it “original constitution” (231). The present tense of huparchôn shows that man reveals continuously that he is God’s eikôn (“image, likeness”). This is an apparent reference to Genesis 1.26-27. Paul would most certainly have been familiar with this text (cf. Acts 22.3), which affirms the creation of both male and female in God’s image. The apostle is therefore not implying that only men are created in the image of God and women are not. By affirming the one he is not denying the other. Paul has a single purpose in mind and is not trying to reconstruct or interpret the creation account. The word eikôn carries the idea of a copy, a living image, a likeness, an embodiment, a manifestation (Kittel and Friedrich 2:388). In Greek thought an eikôn “shares in the reality of what it represents. The essence of the thing appears in the image . . .” (Brown 2:287). The point here may be that man, like God, is in a position of authority.

Man is not only said to be the eikôn but also the doxa (“glory”) of God. Barrett suggests that the word eikôn is used only for the purpose of leading to Paul’s main focus -- the term doxa (252). This is apparent from the fact that a woman is said to be the “glory,” not the “image” of

man (Grosheide 255). Defining the word doxa, according to Fee, is “like trying to pick up mercury between one’s fingers” (1 Cor. 5:15-16). Bauer’s definition in this context is “reflection” (204; cf. NRSV), while McCord renders it “splendor” (326). The word suggests “something which radiates from the one who has it, leaving an impression behind.” In secular Greek it means “expectation, view, opinion, conjecture, repute, praise, fame.” In general it can be rendered “honor” (Brown 2:44-47) or “honorable consideration” (H. Moulton 104). Not only is man the doxa of God, but woman is also the doxa of man. The same word is used in 10:31, where all is to be done to God’s doxa, and again in 11:15, where a woman’s long hair is a doxa to her. However this word may be interpreted, it is probably used consistently in this passage.

The way a man, particularly a Christian man, conducts himself is a reflection of his estimation of God. For him to dress or act unbecomingly would not bring honor to God. If the head-covering was a sign of submission to another person (cf. Morris 152), the man was not obliged to wear it. A woman’s actions reflect the opinion she has of her husband, father, Christian brothers, etc. For her to behave or dress inappropriately would show disrespect and a lack of submission. The head-dress was necessary for her to avoid leaving the wrong impression. Similarly, a woman who conforms to the customary standards of decency in dress and hair length is also showing a healthy self-respect. Thus, the doxa of God is reflected in man’s demeanor (v. 7b), the doxa of man is reflected in woman’s demeanor (v. 7c), and the doxa of woman is reflected in her hair (v. 15). Robertson and Plummer state that man is a reflection of the divine glory, while woman is only a reflection of that reflection (232). Bratcher comments: “In the same way that man, as subordinate to God, reflects his glory, so woman, as man’s subordinate, reflects man’s glory” (105). Although it is not stated here that a woman’s head should be covered because she is man’s doxa, it seems to be implied. “On the one hand” (men) a man is not obliged to be covered, since

he is the image and glory of God; “on the other hand” (de) [a woman is to be covered] since she is the glory of man.

Verses 8-9: For man is not out of woman but woman is out of man; for also man was not created for the sake of the woman, but woman [was created] for the sake of the man.

Although many translations begin a new sentence at verse 8, the idea of the previous verse is continued. It is common in Paul’s writings to extend his thought at certain points, both interrupting and enriching his argument, with parenthetical statements (Ellingworth and Hatton 211). Verses 8-9 appear to be parenthetical (Robertson and Plummer 231; cf. RSV). Both sentences begin with the explanatory gar (“for”), each of which is intended to further explain how the woman is man’s doxa (cf. Blass and Debrunner 236).

Man is not ek (“out of,” “from”) the woman, nor is he dia (“on account of,” “for the sake of”) the woman, but vice versa. This is an obvious reference to the creation story of Genesis 2.18-23. Ek shows the manner of creation, while dia reveals the occasion of creation (Alford 566). Man is God’s doxa because he was brought forth directly from God and was made for his service. Woman is man’s doxa because she came from and was created for the man. “She exists to his honor as the one who having come from man is the one companion suitable to him . . .” (Fee, 1 Cor. 517). Paul is highlighting the respective roles of men and women in creation (Barrett 252-53).

Jackson argues that here the head-covering is tied to the law of creation, not to pagan custom, and therefore remains binding today (6-7; cf. Conzelmann 188). If this is true, since creation order is an eternally established fact, then not only must women be veiled and men unveiled today, but this should have been practiced by God’s people from the beginning of time. The evidence for this, however, is lacking. There is no record that Eve wore a garment over her head; God initially

clothed Adam and Eve alike (Gen. 3.21). No specific examples are found in the Old Testament of any such practices or requirements as those alluded to in 1 Cor. 11. The Law of Moses contains no explicit head-covering legislation. With the exception of the present text, the New Testament is silent on this topic. The creation-order argument is evidently introduced here to clarify gender roles (cf. 1 Tim. 2.11-13). The head-dress, in this context, is linked to the principle of female subordination, and female subordination is tied to the order of creation, but the head-dress itself cannot be traced to the garden of Eden.

Verse 10: On account of this the woman ought to have authority over her head: on account of the angels.

Nearly everyone agrees that this verse is somewhat perplexing. The following observations bear witness to its complexity: “By all counts this is one of the truly difficult texts in this letter” (Fee, 1 Cor. 518); “Frankly, I am puzzled by the passage” (Pagels 543); “After all that has been written, it remains just as obscure as ever” (Hodge 211); “This is one of the most difficult verses in the New Testament” (Ellingworth and Hatton 218); “I do not know what it means; and I regard it as one of the very few passages in the Bible whose meaning as yet is wholly inexplicable” (Barnes 205).

The difficulties include the following: Does the opening dia touto (“on account of this”) point forward or backward? What is the force of opheilei (“ought”)? Why does Paul use the word exousia (“authority”), and what is its significance here? What is meant by dia tous aggelous (“on account of the angels”)? How does this argument fit into the surrounding context?

The sentence begins with the phrase dia touto. When the preposition dia is used with a noun or pronoun in the accusative, it denotes the reason for something (i.e. “because of,” “on account of”). The demonstrative pronoun touto (“this”) is neuter singular, indicating a solitary reason.

The question is, what is “this” on account of which the apostle is establishing his argument? Does dia touto point backward to a previously stated reason, or forward to a subsequent reason, or both?

The most prevalent assumption is that it refers to something formerly stated.¹⁰ Although some commentators relate it to preceding “reasons” (Barrett 253) or “statements” (Bratcher 106), this ignores the singularity of dia touto. Others suggest that it points to a single argument summed up from previous verses (Alford 566), but this leaves an additional reason (“on account of the angels”) with no attachment to the rest of the sentence. If dia touto points backward, then the last phrase cannot be a “new element” (Grosheide 256) or “a subsidiary reason” (Fitzmyer, “A Feature” 49). This would not explain how it is connected to Paul’s argument, and it cannot stand on its own.

Another suggestion is that dia touto looks both forward and backward at the same time (Hurley 207; Fee 1 Cor. 518). The NIV, for example, reads: “For this reason, and because of the angels.” Against this conclusion is the fact that the conjunction “and” was not included by the inspired writer, and the singular touto does not refer to two separate reasons.

The phrase dia touto, being stronger than oun, introduces a special or even exclusive reason, i.e. “precisely for this reason” (Robertson and Plummer 232). The same phrase is used elsewhere in Paul’s writings to point forward, cf. 1 Thess. 2.13; 3.5; 1 Cor. 4.17; 2 Cor. 4.1; Philem. 15; and Rom. 4.16 (Shoemaker 61). “On account of the angels” is apparently the only reason for the apostle’s admonition in this verse. Instead of being directly connected to or in continuation of previous arguments, verse 10 appears to stand on its own. [Note the chiasmic structure discussed on pages 30-31, where this verse seems to be the centerpiece of the paragraph.]

The Woman Ought to have Authority Over her Head.

Paul is making use of the word opheilô (“ought”) for the second time in this passage, and for the fifth time in the epistle. While the man is ouk opheilei (“not bound”) to do something (v. 7), the woman is “bound or obliged by what is due or fitting or consequently necessary” (H. Moulton 296). What is it, then, that the woman is obliged to do? One might understandably anticipate a conclusion which is in contrast to verse 7, but the statement here does not correspond to verse 7 any more than it does to 5.10, 7.36, or 9.10 where opheilô is also used. In fact, it is quite different than what might be expected.¹¹ Fee comments: “This sentence, therefore, has been handled in two ways: either to rework what it says so that it means what one expects, or to let it mean what it says and try to understand that in the context” (1 Cor. 519).

The difficulty centers on the word exousia. The KJV renders it “power,” while most other standard translations use the word “authority.” Bauer’s lexicon lists the following definitions: 1. freedom of choice, right (to act, decide, or dispose of one’s property as one wishes); 2. ability (to do something), capability, might, power; 3. authority, absolute power, warrant; and 4. the power exercised by rulers or others in high position by virtue of their office. A separate category notes: “Various opinions are held concerning the m[eani]ng of 1 Cor 11:10” (277-78). This exousia is linked to the woman’s head (kephalê) by the preposition epi, which means “on,” “upon,” or “over” with the genitive (Bauer 286; Mounce 416). H. Moulton observes that when it is used of authority it means “over” (153-54). The present infinitive echein (“to have”) indicates that the woman should continually have exousia over her head.

The traditional approach has been to understand exousia as a veil which symbolizes someone else’s authority over her. The RSV renders this word “a veil,” with a footnote stating: “Greek ‘authority’ (the veil being a symbol of this).” Some ancient versions replaced exousia in this verse with kalumma (“a covering”), but there is no manuscript support for this and it appears to have

been a case of interpretation rather than translation (cf. Metzger, Textual Commentary 495). Others have added words like “a sign of” (ASV, NIV) or “a symbol of” (NKJV, NASB), but these qualifiers are not in the Greek text. The problem with this understanding is that exousia does not mean “a veil,” and there is no evidence outside this passage for using the veil as a symbol of authority. Bratcher admits that the covering is actually a sign of subordination or dependence, and he suggests that this is the true meaning of the verse (106; cf. Robertson, Word Pictures 4: 161). Moffatt’s translation reads: “woman must wear a symbol of subjection on her head” (cf. Goodspeed). Apparently, many are presumptuously asking: “Why does Paul say ‘authority’ when he means ‘subjection’?” It is most improbable, however, that the apostle would say the exact opposite of what he means (cf. Robertson and Plummer 232).

Gerhard Kittel explains this word by attempting to trace it to an Aramaic root. His theory is that the Aramaic sltwnyh, which is used once in the sense of “a veil,” has an underlying stem that is very similar to a verb meaning “to rule.” Either by a mistranslation or by popular etymology, exousia somehow came to be influenced (Kittel and Friedrich 2:574; cf. Fitzmyer, “A Feature” 52-53). This complex hypothesis has been called by Murphy-O’Connor “speculative” and “implausible” (“Sex and Logic” 497 n. 57). Why would Paul render an Aramaic word by means of a Greek one which cannot designate any kind of head-covering? (Conzelmann 189). Hooker remarks: “This explanation is, one feels, too ingenious, for Paul would surely not have made his argument depend upon a pun which was incomprehensible to his Greek readers” (413; cf. Barrett 254).

If exousia is taken to mean a symbol of someone else’s authority over the woman, this leads to another problem. Exousia is never used in a passive sense in the New Testament, or in any other Greek literature, unless this is the only exception. Ramsay candidly observes:

A vast amount has been written by commentators about [this text], almost entirely erroneous and misleading, and sometimes false to Greek language and its possibilities. Most of the ancient and modern commentators say that the “authority” which the woman wears on her head is the authority to which she is subject -- a preposterous idea which a Greek scholar would laugh at anywhere except in the New Testament, where (as they seem to think) Greek words may mean anything that commentators choose. (203)

Paul employs this word eleven other times in his extant letters to Corinth. In each case it is used in the active sense: 1 Cor. 7.37, “has power (exousian) over his own will”; 8.9, “your liberty (exousia)”; 9.4, “do we not have a right (exousian) to eat and drink?”; 9.5, “have a right (exousian)”; 9.6, “have no right (exousian) not to work”; 9.12, “partake of this right (exousias) . . . have this right (exousia)”; 9.18, “full use of my right (exousia)”; 15.24, “all rule and authority (exousian) and power”; 2 Cor. 10.8, “our authority (exousias)”; 13.10, “according to the authority (exousian) the Lord gave me.” In every instance the subject of the sentence is exercising the exousia rather than someone else having it over him/her. To “have authority” means to have authority in one’s own hand (Lightfoot 236-37).

Moreover, the other occurrences in the New Testament of exousia with the preposition epi always mean “authority over” (cf. Luke 9.1; 10.19; Rev. 2.26; 6.8; 11.6; 13.7; 14.18; 16.9; 20.6). Four of these have the phrase echein exousian epi as found in 1 Cor. 11.10. Thus, Paul is not saying in this verse that a woman is passively under authority (cf. Alford 566), but rather she actively has authority over her head.

Because this idea of a woman having “authority” seems to be incompatible with the apostle’s previous arguments, a number of interpreters have felt justified in adding explanatory words like “a veil,” “a sign of,” “subjection,” etc. But in so doing, one is altering what the inspired writer

has actually said. On the other hand, Scroggs erroneously argues that women are given the authority to preach and pray publicly (“Eschatological Woman” 301-302; “Revisited” 533). This would indeed violate the context and be in opposition to what Paul has taught elsewhere.¹² The challenging task of the conscientious exegete is to accept what is written and try to understand its contextual significance.

The primary meaning of exousia is “freedom of choice, right” (Bauer 277). Every time the word is used in 1 Corinthians leading up to 11.10, it has this connotation, being variously rendered “power,” “authority,” “control,” “liberty,” “right,” “freedom” (7.37; 8.9; 9.4, 5, 6, 12, 18). Although the NRSV translates exousia in 11.10 as “a symbol of authority,” the footnote acknowledges that “a symbol of” is absent in the Greek. An adjacent note then offers an alternate translation: “have freedom of choice regarding her head.” If this is what Paul is actually saying, how is it to be interpreted in this context?

Ramsay notes that in eastern countries the veil is the power and the honor and dignity of a woman. “With the veil on her head, she can go anywhere in security and profound respect” (204-205). While this observation is made with regard to modern oriental customs, the similarity to ancient practices seems relevant. Paul appears to be saying that the woman ought to have control over her head so as not to expose it to indignity (Robertson and Plummer 232). She is in charge of what she wears on her head (Oster 270), and she ought to exercise her freedom responsibly (Orr and Walther 264).¹³

In the immediate context, the apostle has indicated that women are in a position of subordination, and the head-covering appears to have been a distinctive sign of this status. The basic idea of submission (hupotassô) in the Bible is to willingly “sub-order” oneself or to put oneself under the authority of another (Wenham 235-36). In this sense submission is not forced,

but one exercises personal freedom in choosing to submit. Thus, wives are to be subject to their husbands, the church is to be subject to Christ, and all are to be subject to one another (Eph. 5.21-24). These are not acts of involuntarily coercion, but of active love and humility. It is necessary (opheilô) for the woman to keep on having (echein) this freedom.¹⁴

In the three chapters leading up to this passage, Paul had been discussing Christian liberty. While recognizing that a child of God may have the right to do certain things, this freedom must be exercised responsibly. The apostle admonishes: “But be careful, so that your exousia does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (8.9); “What is my reward? That I might proclaim the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my exousia in the gospel” (9.18); “Let no one seek what is his own, but what is another’s” (10.24); “Do not offend the Jews or the Greeks or God’s called-out people, even as I also please all men in everything, not seeking my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ” (10.32 - 11.1). When Paul goes on to say that the woman ought to have exousia over her head, surely he means this “freedom of choice” is to be used in accordance with all that he has written.¹⁵

On Account of the Angels.

Why ought the woman to have liberty over her head? “On account of the angels” is the reason Paul gives. Unfortunately, no further explanation is offered. The apostle assumes, as obvious to his initial readers, a connection no longer apparent to his current readers (Robertson and Plummer 233). This has led to considerable speculation and conjecture. F. W. Farrar observes: “A great deal of irrelevant guesswork has been written on this verse” (Farrar and Thomas 363). E. P. Sanders frankly admits: “I still do not know, after decades as a New Testament scholar, precisely what Paul meant . . .” (495 n. 9). There are three possibilities as to the identification of these

angels: (1) evil angels, (2) human messengers, or (3) holy angels.

1. Evil Angels. Tertullian was of the opinion that the angels mentioned in this text are fallen angels who might be tempted by unveiled women (On the Veiling of Virgins 7; cf. Against Marcion 5.8). This suggestion has been illustrated by reference to Gen. 6.2, interpreting “the sons of God” as angels who consorted with women (Meier 220-21).¹⁶ Accordingly, Dibelius supposes that the veil “possesses magic power over spirits, and is therefore the ‘power’ on her head” (38-39). But this idea, which has been called “somewhat childish” by Robertson and Plummer (233), is not seriously considered by most interpreters. It fails to acknowledge the teaching of Jesus about asexual angels (Matt. 22.30; Mark 12.25), and it is most implausible “that angels, through apostasy from God, could acquire sexual power of which they had previously been destitute” (Keil and Delitzsch, The Pentateuch 1:131-34). Presumably Paul would have had more to say about these bad angels, here and elsewhere, had he considered them a current threat (Hawthorne and Martin 586).

Another proposal is that Paul’s reference is to the punishment of rebellious angels (cf. Jude 6). “Women, because of what happened to angels when they left their proper habitation, don’t leave your sphere of being in subjection to your husband. Remember the fall of the angels!” (Moffitt 4). Against this interpretation is the fact that Paul uses the article (“the” angels), which he never uses in his writings to designate evil angels, unless of course, this is the one exception (Robertson and Plummer 233).¹⁷

2. Human Beings. Roetzel suggests that Paul is admonishing the Corinthians to maintain distinctions between male and female, “because we are not yet angels” (60). The concept of righteous people becoming angels, however, is based more on fairy tale than on Scripture. The Bible affirms that God’s people will one day judge, not become, angels (1 Cor. 6.3). A more

likely scenario is suggested by K. Wilson. The Corinthians may have felt that in Christ they had already arrived at angelic status, and like the angels, they did not need to be concerned about male-female distinctions (447-55; cf. Fee, 1 Cor. 266-357). This, however, does not explain why the woman ought to have exousia over her head.

The Greek word aggelos (“angel”) essentially means “a messenger,” and is sometimes applied to human messengers (cf. Matt. 11.10; Luke 7.24; 9.52; Gal. 4.14). An ancient fragment from the books of Hypotyposes records: “By the angels he means righteous and virtuous men. Let her be veiled then, that she may not lead them to stumble into fornication. For the real angels in heaven see her though veiled” (Roberts and Donaldson 24:158). Accordingly, Paul’s mention of tous aggelous is sometimes understood as local ministers, representatives of the church, or delegates from other congregations (cf. Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy 809). But this view is improbable for at least two reasons. The word exousia does not mean “a veil,” and Paul consistently uses aggelos in this epistle to describe angelic beings, not human messengers (K. Wilson 454). These reasons also render unlikely the suggestion “that it means messengers or spies from the heathen who came to observe the mode in which the Christians worshipped, and would report any thing they observed to their disadvantage” (Hodge 211).

3. Holy Angels. The use of the article with the word “angels” indicates that it is a reference to God’s holy angels (cf. 1 Cor. 13.1; Matt. 13.49; 25.31; Luke 16.22; Heb. 1.4-15). It has been suggested, based on Isa. 6.2, that Paul is encouraging the Corinthian women to imitate the angels who cover their faces before God (Robertson and Plummer 233-34). Opposing this view are the facts that (1) the word exousia does not refer to a veil; (2) in context Paul mentions covering the head but not necessarily the face; and (3) why would the women, and not the men, be called upon to imitate the angels?

A more popular idea is that angels are present in worship assemblies, and women should therefore do nothing to offend them (Alford 567; Morris 154-55; Meier 220; et al.). Joseph Fitzmyer appeals to the Qumrân texts to substantiate this view. He refers to four passages in which bodily defects were considered offensive to the sight of angels, who were believed to be present at the gathering of the army and the assembly of the congregation (“A Feature” 48-58). However, it is less than convincing to cite information from the Qumrân literature to interpret a statement in a letter to the Corinth church. The cultural and religious settings and the subject matter of these texts bear little, if any, resemblance to Paul’s directives.

Clues to understanding this verse may be found in other allusions to angels in 1 Corinthians. In 6.3 Paul affirms that Christians “will judge angels, not to speak of matters involving everyday life.” Accordingly, the point in 11.10 may be that the women, who will also someday judge angels, ought to be exercising authority over their heads in these less important matters. In 13.1 the apostle refers to speaking “in the languages of men and of angels.” Based on the belief that the ability to prophesy was mediated by angels (cf. Acts 7.52-53; Heb. 2.2), the women are told to responsibly exercise their freedom by remaining covered while prophesying (cf. Fee, *1 Cor.* 522).

Another reference to angels is found in 4.9, where the apostles are said to be “a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men.” The statement in 11.10 has consequently been interpreted as an allusion to guardian angels who watch over the natural order (Kittel and Friedrich 2:574). Women should conform to all rules of decorum to show respect for and not to give offense to their guardian angels (Hodge 211; Schweitzer 9; cf. Heb. 1.13-14).

Since the three other references to angels in 1 Corinthians bear little resemblance to one another, it is hard to choose which one, if any, is most relevant to 11.10. It may be that there is

no correlation between any of them. Here is a final possibility to consider. The angels have freedom of choice, yet they remain in their rightful sphere of subjection (Ps. 103.20). In the proper use of their freedom God is glorified (Rev. 7.11-12). Likewise, if a woman was nothing more than a subjugated slave, forced against her will to submit to man, she would not be a glory to him. It is only when she has the freedom of choice (exousia), and exercises that freedom to fulfill her submissive role, that she avoids disgrace and is truly the glory of man.

Upon reviewing some of the many possible interpretations of this text, it must be conceded that certainty is still beyond reach. The meaning would very likely have been understood by the early recipients of the letter, but it appears to be of no substantial consequence for present-day readers.

Verses 11-12: Nevertheless woman is not without man and man is not without woman in the Lord; for just as the woman is out of the man, thus also the man is through the woman; but all things are from God.

The RSV places these two verses in parentheses, as it does verses 8-9, but this is considered “a questionable decision” by Orr and Walther (261). It is probably better to leave out the parentheses, because the impression may be given that these verses contain material less important than the rest of the text (Ellingworth and Hatton 220).¹⁸

The first word in this statement is plên (“nevertheless”), used only four other times by Paul (Eph. 5.33; Phil. 1.18; 3.16; 4.14). As a conjunction it is almost always adversative (Chamberlain 151; cf. Thrall, Greek Particles 21). This word serves to break off a discussion and emphasize something important (Bauer 669). While Shoemaker proposes that plên introduces the central theme of the text (61-62), it is much more likely that it simply draws attention to a vital point that should not be overlooked (Lenski 466). Paul is introducing something new and wishes to prevent

the wrong conclusions being drawn from what he has already written (Grosheide 258 n. 10). Plên emphasizes that even though the woman has authority over her head (v.10), she is still not independent of the man. Furthermore, although the woman was created out of and for the sake of the man (vs. 8-9), man is not independent of her.¹⁹

It is apparent that here in the chiasmic structure the contrast begins, reversing the order from man/woman to woman/man.²⁰ Verses 11-12 correspond exactly to verses 8-9, with two added qualifiers: “in the Lord” and “all things are from God.” While it is true that the woman has been placed in a position below the man, “in the Lord” they are mutually dependent on one another.

The question arises as to what is meant by en kuriô (“in the Lord”)? Outside the writings of Paul, the phrases “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” etc. are rare. This common Pauline formula has no uniform function, but seems to express a range of ideas or relationships. Harris lists the following: incorporative union, sphere of reference, agency or instrumentality, cause, mode, location, and authoritative basis (Brown 3:1192). In Paul’s correspondence to the Corinthians, this phrase is used: (1) to denote membership of Christ and the church (1 Cor. 1.30; 2 Cor. 12.2; 5.17); (2) to characterize an activity or state as Christian (1 Cor. 4.15, 17; 15.18, 31; 16.19); (3) of value judgments describing the sphere of reference (1 Cor. 3.1; 4.10; 9.1-2; 15.58); (4) to denote the objective basis of fellowship with God (1 Cor. 1.2, 4, 5; 15.22; 2 Cor. 1.19); and (5) to sometimes express the gathering of the many into one (Kittel and Friedrich 2:541-42).

Hodge maintains that en kuriô is used here as an adverbial qualifier, meaning “by divine appointment,” “religiously,” or “after a Christian manner.” With this sense Paul would be saying “that it is a Christian doctrine that the man and the woman are thus mutually dependent” (212; cf. Barrett 255; Barnes 207). However, convincing arguments can also be made that this refers to the sphere of their existence as Christians (cf. Fee, 1 Cor. 523 n. 41). In light of the similar

instruction in Galatians 3.28, the latter interpretation may be more likely.

The phrase “in the Lord” seems to suggest the new creation (cf. 2 Cor. 5.17), in contrast to the physical creation of verses 8-9. The woman is in the Lord just as much as the man. Murphy-O’Connor concludes that the differentiation of the sexes is based on the first creation, but gender status disappears in Christ, where the “recreated” woman has an authority equal to that of the man (“Sex and Logic” 497-98). However, even though the relationship in Christ leads to mutual care and respect, it is not the case that created differences or created sexuality is removed (Wenham 285). The only thing Paul suggests is that in the Lord both male and female share the benefits of salvation, and in these higher things they are equal (Grosheide 259). Yet for practical purposes, and for order and propriety, the distinction of sexes must be observed (Ziesler 120; Alford 564). Ridderbos aptly affirms: “on the one hand the woman shares fully in the salvation given in Christ, and there is complete equality between man and woman in that respect . . . on the other hand, fellowship in Christ does not remove the natural distinction between man and woman, and a man’s position of leadership with regard to woman” (460).

The woman is ek (“out of”) the man (cf. v. 8), indicating man’s passive role in creation (Gen. 2.22). The man is dia (“through”) the woman, suggesting her active role in procreation (Gen. 3.16). He is her initial cause, while she is his instrumental cause (Robertson and Plummer 234). But all things are ek (“out of”) God. To panta (“all things”) refers to “the sum total of things, the all” (Hanna 303). Everything, including man and woman, owes its existence to God. The Creator made one sex from dust, the other from man, and now finally both through woman (Fee, 1 Cor. 524). “It matters little whether the man was of the woman or the woman of the man, as both alike are of God . . .” (Hodge 212).

Verse 13: You judge among yourselves; is it proper for a woman to be praying to God

uncovered?

The verb krinate (“judge”) is an aorist imperative, and constitutes the only real command in this whole section.²¹ Paul is ordering them to make a judgment. Krinate, from krinô, means to “judge, think, consider, look upon” (Bauer 451). The apostle uses the emphatic humin (“you”) autois (“yourselves”), stressing that the decision must be their own. In essence he is appealing to their good sense (Goguel 550); “they will have commonly accepted standards which can fill in the outlines of general moral exhortation” (Ziesler 16). The statement here is similar to the words in 10.15: “I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say” (NRSV; cf. 5.12; 6.2-5).

The preposition *en* can denote either “in” or “among.” This phrase has been variously rendered: “Judge in yourselves” (KJV); “Judge among yourselves” (NKJV); “Judge for yourselves” (NASB); “judge by yourselves” (Buttman 113); “in your judgment” (J. Moulton, Grammar 3:253);); and “make up your own minds” (Veitch 90). With this preposition, it is unclear whether Paul intends the decision to be made “in your own hearts” or “among yourselves.” Since he is addressing a community of Christians, “among yourselves” is more probable (Ellingworth and Hatton 220). No one decides anything except in his mind, so Paul seems to be saying, “decide in regard to your own selves” or “in your own case.” In other words, “think of yourselves, then in a sensible manner decide what is proper for you” (Lenski 448).²²

The apostle prompts their common-sense judgment with a rhetorical question about what is prepon (proper, fitting, right).²³ He uses the same word to admonish the ladies at Ephesus to dress appropriately in regard to what is “proper” (1 Tim. 2.8-10). He appeals to their general sense of propriety. The present infinitive proseuchomai connotes “to be praying,” and differs slightly from the previous references to prayer. For one thing, there is no mention here of prophesying, as in verses 4-5. Having alluded to prophesying twice already in connection with

prayer, maybe Paul did not feel the need to repeat himself. Secondly, tô theô (“to God”) is added. Robertson and Plummer suggest that it is included “to emphasize the principle that when she is addressing God she ought not to be asserting her equality with men . . .” (234).²⁴

This question of propriety focuses on whether or not the woman ought to be akatakalupton (“uncovered”) during this activity. Her head being uncovered is indicated by the context. The implied negative answer suggests that it was improper for a woman to be praying with an uncovered head. There are some things a Christian does not do, not because they are forbidden, but because everyone agrees they are unseemly (Grosheide 259). The appeal to personal judgment and propriety necessarily involves a social norm and the convention of a given time (Engberg-Pedersen, “1 Cor.” 683; Meier 222 n. 23).

Verses 14-15: Is not even nature itself teaching you that, on the one hand, if a man has long hair it is a shame to him, but on the other hand, if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her? For the hair corresponds to a covering having been given [to her].

Paul asks another rhetorical question, this one in two parts.²⁵ He begins with oude, a combination of the negative ou and the particle de.²⁶ When a question starts with ou, an affirmative answer is expected (Burton 179), and is essentially the same as a statement (Young 5). The first part of the contrast is introduced with the particle men, which is often not translated into English. When used with the particle de, the idea is “on the one hand . . . on the other hand” (Bauer 502).

Paul appeals to hê phusis autê (“nature itself”). The intensive pronoun autê (“itself”) is used for emphasis (Robertson and Davis 266). That “nature” is being personified (Green 184) is indicated by the article (hê) and by didaskei (“it is teaching”). The word phusis can be used in a variety of senses: 1. natural endowment or condition; 2. natural characteristic or disposition; 3.

nature as the regular natural order; 4. natural being, product of nature, creature (Bauer 869-70). Thayer adds: “a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature” (660).

To determine in what sense Paul uses the word phusis in this context, consideration must be given to what it is said to do. The verb koma is the present active subjunctive form of komaô, meaning to “wear long hair, let one’s hair grow long” (Bauer 442).²⁷ Note that nature teaches humas (“you”). Paul is not just talking about what nature teaches anybody, but what it teaches his addressees -- the Corinthians (Engberg-Pedersen, “1 Cor.” 684 n. 16). It teaches that if a man is wearing long hair, it is atimia (a dishonor, a disgrace, a shame). Atimia is not the same word used for “disgrace” (kataischunô) in verses 4-5. The idea here is “degrading” (RSV), “undignified” (Daube 301), or “loss of honor” (Ellingworth and Hatton 221). How, then, does “nature” teach this?

It is doubtful that Paul means phusis in the sense of the natural world or the laws of nature (cf. Bratcher 107). A man’s hair can naturally grow long.²⁸ Furthermore, there is no way for the natural world to define hair length as being “long” or “short.” Apparently what the apostle has in mind is what Thayer calls “the native sense of propriety” (660), especially since it is linked to the admonition to “judge among yourselves.” In this sense phusis can denote either (1) something innate, inherent, inborn; or (2) acquired nature, i.e. something which by long habit has become nature. The former meaning, in this context, is most improbable. If Paul was alluding to something inherent in all humans, then, without any influence from his culture, every man who grows his hair long should naturally feel ashamed. This would also mean that God instructed the Nazarites to do something which violated the innate conscience which he had given them (Num. 6.1-21).

Paul seems to be employing the word phusis here in a way similar to its use in Ephesians 2.3.

There the apostle describes sinners as being “by phusis children of wrath.” Surely this does not refer to something innate or inborn (cf. Eccles. 7.29; Jas. 1.13-15; et al.). While most translations use the English word “nature,” McCord renders it “custom” in this context. Paul is apparently describing something which by long, habitual practice had become natural to them. In like manner, phusis in 1 Cor. 11.14 seems to apply to one’s natural sense of propriety or customary habit. Perhaps the reference to “custom” in verse 16 is an indication of the apostle’s intent here (Orr and Walther 264). Robertson and Plummer comment: “whatever shocks the common feelings of mankind is not likely to be right” (235).

Another indication that phusis, in this passage, is interconnected with social custom is the fact that it was not always considered degrading for a man to have long hair. Solomon’s horsemen let their hair grow to a considerable length (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 8.185). There was a time in history when Jewish men typically wore longer hair (2 Sam. 14.25-26; Song Sol. 5.2, 11; Ezek. 8.3; cf. Num. 6.1-21; Judg. 13.3-5; 16.13-22).²⁹ From the eighth to the sixth century B. C., Greek and Roman men generally wore their hair long (Gulick 28; Jenkins 26; Hammond and Schullard 914). In Paul’s day, however, a man’s hair was customarily short, and it was considered undignified for him to have long hair (cf. Plutarch, Roman Questions 14; Dio Chrysostom, Discourses 12.15; 35.2; 72.2). Paul’s argument is therefore consistent with the social customs of his time.

On the Other Hand, If a Woman Has Long Hair it is a Glory to Her.

This is in contrast to the first part of the rhetorical question, and is something else taught by phusis. A woman’s long hair is doxa (“a glory”) to her (cf. v. 7). It is one of the things that distinguishes her as a woman from the man, and is converse to the disgrace associated with shorn or shaved hair (vs. 5-6). The Corinthians’ natural sense of propriety taught them that it was

proper for a woman to have long hair (cf. Plutarch, Roman Questions 14; et al.).³⁰

The reason for this is because the hair dedotai (“is given”) to her³¹ anti peribolaiou (“for a covering”). The significance of dedotai cannot be that God gave to the woman and not to the man the possibility of growing long hair, since a man’s hair can grow long. Grosheide understands “is given” to be connected with exousia (v. 10). “The woman has received the liberty to wear long hair and that is at the same time her glory and that which distinguishes her from the man” (260). McGuiggan suggests that dedotai is equivalent to saying “is recognized as being peculiarly hers,” i.e. recognized by society as is the head-dress (153; cf. Roberts 196).

The term peribolaiou, genitive singular of peribolaion, refers to a covering which is thrown (ballô) around (peri). The only other occurrence of this word in the New Testament is a quotation from Psalm 102.27 in Hebrews 1.12, where it means “a mantle” (Orr and Walther 261). The main question here concerns the meaning of the preposition anti. Originally it meant “facing, over against,” and every usage should be explained starting with this fundamental idea (Moule 71; Chamberlain 116). Dana and Mantey contend that there is conclusive proof that the dominant meaning for anti in the first century was “instead of” (100). However, Waltke argues that such a meaning in this verse would render the rest of Paul’s argument nonsensical (55). From the root sense of anti, it came to denote equivalence, exchange, and substitution. In this verse, it appears to signify “equivalence,” where one object is set over against another as its equivalent.

In 1 Cor. 11:15 Paul’s point is not that a veil is superfluous for a woman since nature has given her hair in place of a covering, but rather, arguing analogically, he infers from the general fact that “hair has been given to serve as a covering”. . . that the more generous supply of hair that a woman has when compared with a man shows the appropriateness of her being covered . . . (Brown 3:1179; cf. Bauer 73)

Verse 16: But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom nor [do] the churches of God.

The last sentence in this section begins with the particle de, where it is obviously adversative (cf. KJV, NKJV, ASV, et al.). McCord renders it “however.” Since this statement makes a clumsy opening to the next paragraph, it is best taken as concluding the subject introduced in verses 4-5 (Robertson and Plummer 235). The indefinite pronoun tis (“anyone”) is generally understood to refer to anyone among the brethren at Corinth.

The verb dokei, third person singular of dokeô, is used of subjective opinion to denote “think, believe, suppose, consider” (Bauer 201). It is variously rendered “seems” (NKJV), “wants” (NIV), “is inclined” (NASB), and “is disposed” (RSV). The present tense of this verb and the present infinitive einai (“to be”) indicate the persistence of this disposition. The adjective philoneikos means “quarrelsome, contentious” (Bauer 860). This is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament, and it appears in the Septuagint only in Ezek. 3.7, describing Israel’s stubbornness.

Whether or not there was actually contentiousness over this matter is unknown. The conditional conjunction ean (“if”) does not make it certain. Grosheide reasons that through their conduct some may have appeared to be contentious without really being so. “In the Corinthian scene, where customs existed which were defended by the one and disapproved by another, this might easily happen. In his defense of an existing custom a person may easily go too far, though he does not mean to do so. But, after all, only that which appears to the eye can be taken into account” (261).³² Paul’s concluding statement may be related to his real purpose for writing this section -- to avoid contention and promote unity (Hawthorne and Martin 585-86).

When the apostle writes hêmeis toiautên sunêtheian ouk echomen (“we do not have such a

custom”), this brings up several questions. Who is included in “we”? To what “custom” does he refer? Does he mean “no such custom” (ASV) or “no other practice” (NASB)? How does this statement relate to and influence the whole section?

Various opinions are held as to whom the word “we” refers, whether Paul and Sosthenes (1.1), or the Ephesus church (16.8), or the other apostles (4.9), or Paul’s helpers and the Gentile churches they founded (Meier 223), or the immediate company of the apostles, including the women who assembled with them (Alford 569), or the Corinthian church (Barrett 258), or simply Paul himself, using an editorial “we” (K. Wilson 459).

Since Paul speaks of himself using the first person singular (cf. v. 17), “we” obviously includes more than just himself. There is no suggestion elsewhere in the letter that Sosthenes played any significant part in writing it (Ellingworth and Hatton 222). That the word “we” is distinct from “the churches of God” shows that it unlikely includes a congregation. Paul is probably referring to himself and the other apostles (cf. 4.9-13). His reference to “the churches of God” is not uncommon in this letter (cf. 1.2; 4.17; 7.17; 14.33).

The next question concerns the meaning of toioutên, accusative feminine singular of toioutos. The NASB, NIV, and RSV render it “other,” while the KJV, NKJV, and ASV render it “such.” These two renderings mean opposite things and add to the exegetical confusion. The word toioutos means “of such a kind, such as this” (Bauer 821; cf. H. Moulton 406; Thayer 627; et al.). Nowhere else in the Bible is this word ever translated “other.” There are at least seven Greek words for “other,” none of which was used by Paul in this verse. This is another example where translators have taken on the role of interpreter, and in so doing have rewritten what was in the original text.

To which “custom” does Paul refer? The word he uses is sunêtheia, meaning “custom, habit,

usage” (Bauer 821). This involves more than a mere “practice” (prassô). It is a customary or habitual practice; an established custom (cf. H. Moulton 389). A common interpretation is that the custom to which the apostle refers is contentiousness (Lenski 451-52; Grosheide 261). If this is the case, he would essentially be saying: “Christians are not contentious -- so you must not be contentious; you must not insist” (Engberg-Pedersen, “1 Cor.” 684-86). However, toiautên sunêtheian (“such a custom”) does not naturally refer to contentiousness (Hodge 214), and why would Paul think it necessary to say that apostles and churches have no specific habit as this? (Robertson and Plummer 236).³³

The more prevalent view is that this custom refers to women praying or prophesying with uncovered heads (Morris 156; Barrett 258; Waltke 55-56; et al.). Paul would then be saying, “women must wear a covering, since we have no such custom of unveiled women.” This interpretation, however, poses some difficulties. There is no real indication in this passage that the women had been uncovering their heads to the point that it had become a custom. It may have been a potential problem, but one would expect a stronger rebuke from the apostle, of which he was capable, if propriety was habitually being violated. Ample evidence shows that the customary practice of the time was for women to cover their heads, not to be uncovered. Furthermore, if this custom pertains to unveiled women, why would the translators of the NASB, NIV, and RSV render this expression “we have no other practice”? This would mean that the only practice recognized in the churches was for women to have uncovered heads -- just the opposite of what is being discussed! Finally, how could these brethren have judged for themselves regarding the impropriety of unveiled women (v. 13) if the customary practice was that very thing? This explanation seems forced and does not adequately represent any established usage in or outside this text.

The evident custom, suggested in the immediate and historical contexts of this passage, is the convention of women covering their heads.³⁴ Many commentators argue that Paul is here affirming the universal practice of the churches (cf. Buttrick 129; Lowery 159; et al.), but this is just the opposite of what he actually says. He is not appealing to something the churches do, but rather to something the churches do not have. It is not a matter of what was practiced or not practiced in other congregations, but the point is that the head-covering custom was not a Christian dogma. It did not originate with the apostles or the churches. It was not bound by the apostles on the churches. The head-covering was likely worn by Christian ladies in many different regions, but this was part of their culture, not part of their religion. There were things which Paul taught and appointed in every congregation (4.17; 7.17), but this was obviously not one of them. It is wrong to say that human custom is never mentioned in this passage (cf. Jackson 14). Paul makes a distinction between the inspired precepts he had delivered to them (v. 2) and “no such custom” (v. 16).

This understanding, however, does lead to further questions. If the term “we” includes Paul and the apostles, how would this custom relate to them? Moreover, why would Paul presumably argue in favor of this custom (vs. 5-13), then conclude by saying, “we have no such custom”? In response to the first question, the apostles clearly did not have the habit of covering their heads. Furthermore, the apostles and the churches constitute a whole (Hodge 214), so it would be natural to speak in general terms. But why does Paul seemingly disavow a custom of which he obviously approves? This difficulty is probably what led the translators of the NASB, NIV, and RSV to alter the text.

The problem here is similar to the one encountered in verse 10. Paul is saying the opposite of what one anticipates. The exegete can therefore do one of two things: either rework what the

verse says to mean what he expects, or to let it mean what it says and try to harmonize that with the context (cf. Fee, 1 Cor. 519). No one can express better than Paul did the point of what he was trying to say. The best anyone can do is attempt to clarify certain aspects of what is said in relation to the whole (Engberg-Pedersen, “The Gospel” 558).

The apostle is apparently dealing with a very sensitive and controversial issue. There may have been some among the Corinthian brethren who were questioning the custom of head-coverings and maybe suggesting that it was unnecessary, especially in the home or at special gatherings. There could also have been others attempting to bind the head-covering as religious law and denying women their freedoms. Paul appeals to common-sense and to reason. His tone throughout this whole section is a far cry from stronger arguments used elsewhere in the letter (cf. 4:18 - 5:5; 11:29-34). In an indirect and tactful manner, the apostle tries to assist the Corinthians in making their own decision. He complements them and introduces the underlying principle of God’s hierarchical design (vs. 1-2). He appeals to social disgrace (vs. 4-6) and to female subordination (vs. 7-9), while affirming the woman’s liberty (v. 10) and male-female mutuality (vs. 11-12). He then calls for their own judgment based on propriety (vs. 13-15). In the end, however, Paul cannot make a binding law, so he concedes that this is neither an apostolic nor a congregational custom (v. 16).³⁵ This does not negate anything he has said, but it emphasizes that this matter is not a religious custom and should therefore not be an issue for congregational disputes (cf. Titus 3.9).

Conclusion

For many, the difficulty in interpreting this passage seems to rest on two underlying assumptions: (1) If what Paul has written is taken at face value, it cannot be harmonized with the context; and (2) If the context is considered, what Paul has written cannot be taken at face value.

Thus the text is sometimes altered by well-intentioned interpreters and translators, while the apostle's original purpose remains aloof. However, "Paul could hardly expect his Corinthian readers to be as inventive as twentieth-century [New Testament] scholars" (Pagels 544). It is the contention of this writer that the inspired text does not need additions or alterations in order for one to attain a reasonable and consistent understanding of it. "The fullest possible understanding of Paul's letters must rest on the fullest possible understanding of the factors which caused Paul to write. For each of Paul's letters we desire to know not simply the meaning of the words Paul used, but the situation which evoked them and the effect Paul intended them to have in the minds of those to whom they were addressed" (Hurd 1).

Summary

Precise knowledge of the occasion which prompted the writing of 1 Cor. 11.2-16 is not available to modern exegetes. The best one can do is to reconstruct, as accurately as possible, a scenario which is consistent with the information provided by the passage and its surrounding context. The popular conjecture that the women at Corinth were engaged in a defiant emancipation movement, casting off their head-coverings and flaunting their independence, is untenable. Nothing in Paul's discourse, or anywhere else in the New Testament, warrants this supposition.³⁶ A more plausible scenario is presented as follows.

The Christian ladies at Corinth were probably meeting in private homes in order to pray and prophesy. Gatherings restricted to females, and possibly children, would have been the only settings in which they could legitimately exercise their gifts and fulfill certain ministries (cf. 14.34-35; Tit. 2.3-4). Some of these women might have questioned the necessity of wearing head-dresses in the home (where such was not customary), especially when no men were present. They may have removed their coverings during these gatherings, which eventually came to the attention

of the congregation, or they simply asked the advice of the male leaders. Should they have the right to unveil themselves in these situations? Is this a matter of faith? At least some of the more vocal men may have reacted against this, and like the Judaizing teachers with the circumcision controversy (Acts 15.1), sought to bind the head-covering in every circumstance as a matter of faith and religious law. The resulting dispute needed the wise counsel of the apostle Paul.

Paul was obviously dealing with a very delicate situation. If he sided with the men, he would have been: (1) denying the women their right to decide in a matter of personal expediency; (2) endorsing a man-made requirement as a matter of objective faith; and (3) leaving the impression that all women in every culture are bound to observe this edict. If he sided with the women, he would have been: (1) discrediting the male leadership and intensifying the problem³⁷; (2) opening up the possibility that weaker Christians might be caused to stumble (cf. 8.9-13); and (3) contributing to the potentiality of unbelievers being offended or left with the wrong impression (cf. 10.23-32).

The apostle deals with this issue in a very tactful manner. “Although he speaks for liberty, he is in conflict: he wants liberty and order. Whoever considers the disorder in the Corinthian community can sympathize with Paul” (Pagels 546). He does not formulate a rule they had to follow, but rather offers a few reasonable premises and calls on them to make their own decision. His arguments plainly favor the safest course -- that women remain veiled. Paul’s approach may be summed up as follows. Since men are not expected to cover their heads during religious activities, as such would be considered shameful, would not the opposite apply to women? Because female subordination is according to God’s design, a Christian woman should be careful not to do something which might give the impression that this arrangement is being disrespected or ignored. At the same time, since angels have free will yet remain in their proper sphere of

subjection, a woman ought to have freedom over her head and be trusted to use it responsibly. After all, in the Lord neither man nor woman is independent of the other, and all things are from God. You must decide among yourselves. You already know what is proper. However, if this situation is going to persistently cause contention, be aware that it is not a matter of faith as if it were divinely decreed. It did not originate with the apostles nor is it binding on any of the churches. Since it is a social custom, it should not be an issue which causes disputes among brethren.

In support of this conclusion is the fact that the apostle never commands the women to be veiled. The present imperative in verse 6, “let her have her head covered,” is not based on divine law but on social disgrace. The aorist imperative in the same verse, “let her also have her hair cut off,” is an even stronger imperative. But Paul is reasoning by way of analogy and appealing to common sense. The only real command in the whole passage is the aorist imperative in verse 13, where the apostle orders: “You judge among yourselves.” Paul was fully capable of expressing his own judgment in no uncertain terms (cf. 5.3). While his judgment might be inferred from his arguments, it is never explicitly stated. He wants the Corinthians to decide for themselves.

Neither do the two uses of opheilei (“ought”) measure up to a divine head-covering injunction. Paul simply says in verse 7 that the man is not obliged (opheilei) to cover his head, while in verse 10 the woman ought (opheilei) to have authority (exousia) over her head. Even if a woman “ought” to wear a head-dress (implied in v. 7), the context does not impose this by command, but “by reason, or by the times, or by the nature of the matter under consideration” (Thayer 469). The point being made is that a woman, who ordinarily wears a head-covering in public, should also have her head covered when she prays or prophesies (Grosheide 253). The discussion is more concerned with the consequences of removing the covering than it is with the purpose of

wearing it (Weeks 25).

The structure and content of Paul's discourse form a masterpiece of effective persuasion. Engberg-Pedersen comments: "there is a certain way of changing other people (the method), viz. that of admonishing them, exhorting them, reminding them of things they in a way already know and subscribe to It is that of speaking to them in ways that do not encroach upon their independence" ("The Gospel" 572-73).

Contemporary Application

The question is not whether this passage should be applied today, but rather what principles in the passage should be applied. If the text is perceived to be dictating what a woman must wear on her head in certain situations, then the conclusion is likely to be that head-coverings should be worn by women today. On the other hand, if the issue involves culturally relevant symbols, then other means which sustain the same principles may be acceptable in different historical and cultural settings. That is not to say that the symbolic nature of head-coverings is a legitimate basis for rejecting the practice (K. Wilson 460). It simply means that although "Christianity is supracultural in its origin and truth, it is cultural in its application" (Hesselgrave 366).

Whenever this or any other passage of Scripture is considered, it is important to keep it in its historical and cultural context. Failure to do so can lead, and in many cases has led, to the binding of things such as feet washing (John 13.14), ritualistic kissing (1 Cor. 16.20), laying on of hands (Acts 13.3), anointing with oil (Jas. 5.14), lifting hands (1 Tim. 2.8), attempts at tongue-speaking (1 Cor. 14.1 ff.), church councils (Acts 15.1-6), taking up serpents and drinking poison (Mark 16.18), et al. The message of the Bible is just as relevant today as it ever was, but in order to rightly determine what the actual message is and how it applies, it is necessary to consider the historical and cultural settings in which it was originally written.

Much of the Bible's message is taught in principles. A principle is more general than a direct command, is always relevant, and can be variously applied, depending on the situation. For example, to "dress modestly" is a biblical principle (1 Tim. 2.9), but how does it apply? In first-century Ephesus it was applied by women not wearing braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or expensive clothing. In nineteenth-century Europe, it was applied by ladies not wearing skirts above their ankles. In twentieth-century Saudi Arabia, it is applied by women not exposing their faces or hair. Just because braided hair no longer betokens immodesty in most cultures, the underlying principle is not irrelevant.

While biblical principles are always relevant, the means or forms of expressing them may be liable to change. For example, when Paul said to the Corinthians, "Greet one another with a sacred kiss" (1 Cor. 16.20), there was both a principle involved and a means of expressing that principle. Greeting one another in an appropriate and sacred manner was the principle. The means of expression was a kiss. In many cultures today the form of greeting is different than that of ancient Corinth. The principle of appropriate greeting, however, is unaltered.

Admittedly, this hermeneutical principle is subject to abuse. Some may surmise, for example, that the elements of the Lord's Supper are not essential as long as one remembers the meaning behind them. But Paul's strict and commanding tone in 11.17-29 clearly demonstrates that the Lord's Supper is in a completely different category than what is discussed in the first part of the chapter. William Barclay reasons that people in the twentieth century will unlikely accept the view of the subordination of women, implying that it is therefore no longer relevant (108). However, female subordination is based on the unchanging order of creation and is one of the main principles underlying the whole discussion in 11.2-16.

Some of the enduring principles which may be gleaned from this passage, also confirmed

elsewhere in Scripture, include the following: (1) There is a hierarchical arrangement, established at creation, involving the roles of male leadership and female subordination; (2) man is the image and glory of God, while woman is man's glory; (3) Christians should be consistent in their behavior; (4) spiritual activities should not be combined with disgraceful practices; (5) women, as well as men, ought to have freedom of choice; (6) men and women must maintain natural distinctions; (7) in the Lord, men and women are spiritually equal and co-dependent; (8) Christians have the ability, the right, and the responsibility to make wise decisions for themselves; (9) both men and women have active roles to play in spiritual service; (10) social customs must not be elevated to the position of divine law, nor should they be the source of congregational disputes; (11) it is right and good to live in harmony with customs that are right within themselves; and (12) a Christian's demeanor must always evidence a genuine concern for purity and decency.

The means of expressing these principles in first-century Corinth included women having long hair and covering their heads, with the opposite applying to men. While the principles remain relevant today, the symbols do not, unless one's cultural conventions are similar to those of the original recipients of this epistle. It is a mistake to wrest a local directive from the circumstances in which it was given, and to transform it into a universal decree (Morris 156). "It seems that Paul was asking the Corinthians to follow a normal cultural practice that in that day reflected an understanding that God has created men and women to function in different roles. As long as men and women today are not communicating by their dress that the creative order and distinctions are done away, they are being obedient to this passage" (K. Wilson 461).

Throughout the discussion, the significance rests on what the wearing or not wearing of the head-dress implies (Robertson and Plummer 235-36). In a society where being unveiled is not

“one and the same thing” as the one having been shaved, it would seem that the appeal to “let her have her head covered” would not be binding. Where else would a conditional pronouncement be obligatory after the condition became untrue? The disgrace associated with the uncovered head is not based on divine legislation, but on the meaning of a fashion of dress dictated by custom (Roberts 198). “While the logical conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing is that it is not necessary for women to wear a hat or other head-covering, Christian women, nevertheless, in their dress and behavior will always comply with the accepted conventions consistent with decorum” (Martin 239 n. 3). The principles taught in 1 Cor. 11.2-16 are unvarying, and to disregard God’s distinctive function for men and women is wrong in any culture.

What about those who wish to bind the precise details of this passage and insist that ladies cover their heads in worship assemblies today? Rester, for example, argues that anyone who violates these directives is living in open defiance to heaven and in alliance with hell (29). But to bind something on others which God himself has not bound is pretentious. An initial response is one of consistency. Where in this passage does Paul restrict the wearing of a head-dress to the worship assembly? He neither identifies nor limits the setting in which the designated activities are engaged. Moreover, if the head-covering is the “symbol of modesty and subordination” (Barnes 205-206), why should it be restricted to the assembly? Should not modesty and submissiveness also be manifested outside the assembly? Guthrie rightly observes that “no clear distinction can be drawn between what is fitting for public worship and what is fitting at other times” (Pastoral Epistles 74). Guy N. Woods, who later changed his position upon further study, at one time argued that women should pursue the safest course, which is to wear some form of covering on their heads in the assembly (N. pag.). However, the safest course is to always have the head covered, both in and out of the assembly.

If one insists that this passage requires a covering for the head today, Roberts contends that it must therefore require the same type of covering and not a substitute. “If it be argued that the significance should have been kept and that those who first ignored it were sinning, then it would also follow that the ones who first substituted another covering for the veil also sinned in the process, and that those who continue to do so also sin” (198). A hat or a handkerchief does not communicate the intended thought of 1 Cor. 11.2-16. The “intent of the custom of women wearing hats today, for fashion, seems far different from the purpose of the custom in the first century” (Lowery 159). The meaning of the head-covering was clear to those living in ancient Corinth, but the same is not true for those living in a twentieth-century Western culture.³⁸ Fee comments: “For Paul the issue was directly tied to cultural shame that scarcely prevails in most cultures today . . . it would seem in cultures where women’s heads are seldom covered, the enforcement of such in the church turns Paul’s point on its head” (1 Cor. 512).

If a Christian woman chooses to wear a head-covering today, she has the right to do so. However, there are some things she ought to consider. Paul was encouraging women to do something that was normal in their culture; something which reflected their womanhood. The same practice in many societies today would be abnormal, thus exhibiting what Paul sought to prevent (cf. K. Wilson 461-62). While children of God are most certainly to be different from the world, they are not totally divorced from their environment and should modestly avoid drawing undue attention to themselves.³⁹

Christians who differ on this matter can still work and worship together, as long as proper attitudes are manifested, opinions are not bound, and consciences are not violated. The wearing or not wearing of a head-covering is a matter of personal liberty and is not a collective work of the church (Dawson 92-93). If one woman is veiled in an assembly and another is not, neither

affects the activity of the other. Both are individually responsible before God. “There are some issues over which brethren may disagree without any break in fellowship, and wise Christians generally recognize this” (Jackson 21).

Concluding Remarks

While the present writer believes his conclusions to be valid and sensible, he is not naive enough to think that he has sufficiently answered all the questions which have puzzled scholars for centuries. Kenneth Wilson is right when he says: “Because of the controversial and difficult nature of this section, any interpretation must be held with a certain degree of caution” (442). May all who approach this passage of Scripture do so with humility and reverence, avoiding extremes, and seeking to comprehend and obey its timeless message.

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all New Testament quotations, except 1 Cor. 11.2-16, are from the third edition of McCord's New Testament Translation of the Everlasting Gospel.

² Adapted from Fee (1 Cor. 21-23); Maclaren (164).

³ Here the outline breaks with the traditional approach of including these verses in the next section, with a general heading like "The Worship Assembly." This writer believes that 11.2-16 is more closely related to the preceding section for at least the following reasons: (1) The common theme of exousia; (2) The opening of 11.2 ff. naturally follows the end of the previous section (11.1); (3) The subject matter of 11.2-16 cannot be limited to a public assembly. This is considered further in the discussion on verse 5.

⁴ Adapted from Shoemaker (62).

⁵ Those items which appear not to fit exactly into these parallels are either foundational (v.3), comparative, explanatory, or incidental.

⁶ The translation of 1 Cor. 11.2-16 is the author's own, unless otherwise noted.

⁷ The particle de occurs 107 times in 1 Corinthians.

⁸ Kelcy remarks: "By reminding man that Christ is his head Paul discourages any sort of tyrannical dictatorship on the part of man over woman, at the same time showing that the relationship of man and woman should be one of love and consideration" (1 Cor. 49).

⁹ It may have been that some contentious voices were trying to deny women their liberty (cf. v. 10), or were binding social customs as religious law, or were demanding that head-dresses be worn even in the home.

¹⁰ Verses 8-9 serve as an explanation of verse 7. If dia touto (v.10) points backward, it is either an explanation of an explanation, or it reaches back to verse 7 as an additional clarification of the woman as man's doxa.

¹¹ The meaning of a statement cannot be determined on the basis of a single word or its connection to a similar word. "It is the sentence (and of course the still larger literary complex such as the complete speech or poem) which is the linguistic bearer of the usual theological statement, and not the word (the lexical unit) or the morphological and syntactical connection" (Barr 263).

¹² Waltke presumes the meaning of this text is that a covering gives the woman the authority to pray and prophesy (52), in which case: (1) she must exercise her "authority" according to the restrictions placed upon her (e.g. 14.34-35); and (2) it must be remembered that the words exousia and kalumma are not synonymous.

¹³ An alternative explanation is that exousia is used here in the sense of the woman's ability to control herself (Engberg-Pedersen, "1 Cor." 683 n. 13).

¹⁴ As Engberg-Pedersen considers Paul's manner of persuasion, he observes: "the content of the gospel demands a method of effecting change in other people that acknowledges their freedom and independence in relation to the person who is trying to influence them" ("The Gospel" 572).

¹⁵ K. Wilson remarks: "The fact that Paul did not refer specifically to the headcovering here indicates that the issue is not the exact use of the headcovering but the larger issue of the disregard of distinctions. This clearly shows that cultural conditioning is present in the passage" (453).

¹⁶ cf. Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 1.73; In support of this view, Farrar confidently asserts: "there can, I think, be no shadow of doubt in the unprejudiced mind of any reader who is familiar with those Jewish views of the subject in which St. Paul had been trained, that he is referring to the common Rabbinic interpretation of Gen. vi.2 . . ." (701-702). Yet after making this statement, Farrar goes on to admit that at least one other view is possible.

¹⁷ Another implausible suggestion is that women must conform to society's normal conventions, which are regarded as being under the control of evil angels (Whiteley 26). See also Ellis (Paul's use of O.T. 62 n. 7).

¹⁸ Carl Holladay supposes that verses 11-12 "are the words of an interlocutor, an imaginary opponent, expressing the views of the 'enlightened' within the church" (142). But this conjecture is no more convincing than Shoemaker's proposal that verses 3-9 merely summarize the position of the Corinthians (62-63).

¹⁹ "Although Paul only needs woman's derivation from man to support his point, he qualifies his argument so that no one will press more meaning into it than he himself intends . . ." (Hawthorne and Martin 586).

²⁰ The Majority Text (cf. KJV, NKJV) reverses the order to coincide with vs. 8-9, but this has no early support (cf. Fee, 1 Cor. 513 n. 4, 522). The chiasmic structure is discussed on pages 30-32 of this thesis.

²¹ The imperative is the mood of command (Mounce 303). The aorist imperative is decidedly more pressing and urgent than the present (J. Moulton 1:173; 3:75). This aorist imperative (v. 13) differs from the aorist and present imperatives in verse 6, in that the imperatives in verse 6 are both conditional and used by way of analogy.

²² Grosheide believes that both ideas are present: "in your own circle as well as in your own heart" (259).

²³ This may be another thing which connects this section to the previous one. In 10.15-16, the appeal to good sense is followed by a rhetorical question (Fee, 1 Cor. 525).

²⁴ Robertson and Plummer also suggest that another principle being emphasized is that she should not be trying to draw the attention of men (236). But this assumes that men are present while she is praying.

²⁵ The KJV, NKJV, and ASV prematurely bring the question to a close at the end of verse 14, and make verse 15 a separate statement. The UBS Greek text shows both verses as part of the same question. Paul emphasizes anêr (“man”) and gunê (“woman”) by putting these subjects at the beginning of their respective clauses (Simcox 197; Buttman 389). The anêr clause serves as a means of contrast, while the gunê clause (introduced by de) appears to be the main emphasis (cf. Robertson and Plummer 234-35).

²⁶ This is the only time in the writings of Paul that oude begins a rhetorical question. It is very probable that ou de is intended (Orr and Walther 261; Fee, 1 Cor. 526 n. 10). That this is a rhetorical question is evidenced by the antithesis of the two clauses and the men . . . de formula (Buttman 380).

²⁷ The only time komaô appears in the New Testament is in this passage (Orr and Walther 261).

²⁸ The suggestion that “baldness” is nature’s way of teaching this principle is unlikely, since a man who is bald on the top of his head can still grow long hair, and there were times when even baldness was considered contemptible (cf. 2 Kings 2.23; Jer. 47.5; 48.37; Ezek. 7.18).

²⁹ “A sculptured portrait of Israelites on the famous Black Obelisk of the Assyrian King Shalmanezar III, dating from the ninth century B. C., shows them with long [shoulder-length] hair” (A Readers Guide 25).

³⁰ Achilles Tatius, in The Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon 8.6, writes: “she has been robbed of the crowning glory of her hair; you can still see where her head was shaved” (Gaselee 399).

³¹ The dative pronoun autê (“to her”) is absent from several manuscripts and is variously positioned in others. While some question its authenticity, the UBS committee felt that there was enough evidence to include it in the text, though with some hesitancy (Metzger, Textual Commentary 495-96).

³² Lenski argues that the “condition of reality leads one to think that Paul expects some in Corinth ‘to be contentious’ . . .” (451).

³³ The opinion of Orr and Walther is that “such a custom” can refer to both contentiousness and the practices rejected in the passage, since the former is an extension of the latter (261).

³⁴ Although Kelcy reaches a different conclusion, he labels the section: “The Custom of Veiled Women” (1 Cor. 49).

³⁵ This does not mean that head-coverings were not worn in other churches, but rather the custom did not

originate as an edict from the apostles or churches. This was not a religious custom.

³⁶ Another unlikely suggestion is that Paul is concerned about homosexuality, displayed in the hair styles of the Corinthians (cf. Scroggs, “Eschatological Woman Revisited” 534; Murphy-O’Connor, “Sex and Logic” 485-500). But earlier in the letter Paul affirmed that those who had been homosexuals are no longer (6.9-11). It is evident that he was capable of clearly expressing the topic of homosexuality if that were his theme.

³⁷ In the first epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, possibly written between AD 68 and early 70 (cf. J. Robinson 327-35), it was reported that the church at Corinth, on account of one or two persons, was engaged “in sedition against its presbyters” (Coxe 1:18).

³⁸ Though the head-covering no longer expresses the same symbolism that it once did, this alone is not sufficient grounds to reject it. “Almost all symbols require education for their meaning to become clear. This is true in the symbolic practices of baptism and the Lord’s supper, which do not immediately communicate the ideas of initiation and fellowship” (K. Wilson 462). The difference is that the symbolism of the head-covering was never divinely instituted, though it was sanctioned by Paul in a particular historical-cultural context.

³⁹ Society does not set the standard for what is right. However, in some circumstances it helps determine what is improper and offensive.

Appendix 1

The Meaning of Kephalê Continued

In the absence of any reliable evidence to sustain “source” or “origin” as the sense of kephalê, some scholars argue their case by attacking the only other logical meaning. Gretchen Hull reasons that if “authority over” is thought to be the significance of kephalê in 1 Cor. 11.3, this would suggest a dominant to subordinate hierarchy within the Godhead and Christ’s divinity would be undermined (193-94). But this argument fails to recognize the crucial distinction between essence and function. One may possess a different function than another while maintaining equality in essence or worth. The contrast between the members of the Godhead is functional, not one of nature or being (John 1.1, 14; 5.18; 10.30; 14.28; Phil. 2.5-8; et al.; cf. Schreiner, Recovering 128-29).

Hull argues further that the idea of women submitting to men cannot be reconciled with the injunction of Eph. 5.21 calling for mutual submission (194). This apparent discrepancy, however, is not as difficult to harmonize as Hull supposes. All Christians have been directed to love, serve, and submit to one another (Gal. 5.13; Eph. 5.21; 1 Pet. 5.5), while each has been allocated different functions to perform. For example, elders are to “rule over” the flock and function as “overseers” (1 Thess. 5.12-17; Heb. 13.7-24; 1 Pet. 5.2). The other members must “obey” and “submit” to them (Heb. 13.17). As far as the relationship to one another in Christ is concerned, there is mutual submission among all believers. At the same time, there are different God-ordained roles, involving authority and unilateral submission, to be respected and fulfilled. The meaning of kephalê is not altered by the injunction of Eph. 5.21. A woman is never said to be the kephalê of man. “There is no indication that women are inferior; rather, they have a divinely ordained place in the structure of society which should be preserved” (Weed 93, 179).

It is difficult to understand how some scholars can argue that kephalê has never connoted “authority over” (cf. Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy 808; Scroggs, “Eschatological Woman: Revisited” 534 n. 8). The implied element of superior rank is expressed in the Septuagint in the following passages: Deut. 28.13, 43 f.; Judg. 10.18; 11.8, 9; 11.11; 2 Sam. 22.44; Ps. 18.43; Isa. 7.8, 9; 9.13-14; 19.15; Jer. 38.7 (cf. Heb. 31.7); Lam. 1.5; and Dan. 2.31 ff. (Kittel and Friedrich 3:675; Fitzmyer, “Kephalê” 54; Fee, 1 Cor. 503 n. 44). The same usage is also found in the writings of Philo, On Dreams 2.207, Moses 2.30; 2.82, and On Rewards and Punishments 114, 125; and in the writings of Josephus, Jewish Wars 3.54 and 4.261 (Stephenson 459; Cervin 99-111; cf. Fitzmyer, “Kephalê” 54-55). In Grudem’s survey of 2,336 instances of kephalê in thirty-six authors from the eighth century B. C. to the fourth century A. D., not a single passage revealed “source” or “origin” as a possible meaning, whereas 16.2 percent of the metaphoric uses implied a person of authority or of superior rank (Does Kephalê ?” 48-52). Richard Cervin attempted to refute these findings in an article published in the Spring 1989 issue of Trinity Journal (85-112), but Grudem thoroughly and convincingly answered Cervin’s arguments in the same journal the following year (“A Response” 3-72).

Appendix 2

The Nature of the Covering

The term “covering” is generic and can be used as either a noun or a verb (e.g. “The covering is covering the table”). But the verb does not in itself reveal the nature of that which does the covering. For example, the seraphim in Isaiah 6.2 covered his face, but with what did he cover it? If an object had not been supplied in the text, his face could have been covered with any number of things, whether dirt, hands, a garment, etc. As Paul used a form of the verb katakaluptô (“to cover”) five times in this section, what was the nature of the covering that he had in mind?

Natural Covering of Hair

It has been argued that Paul is not at all addressing the matter of an artificial covering in this passage, but rather the discussion involves only the natural covering of the hair (cf. Murphy-O'Connor, “1 Cor. 11 Again” 265-69). Arguments in support of this view include the following:

1. “Nowhere in this passage is any word ever used for a material veil or head-dress” (Martin 233). The noun “a covering” is used only once in this paragraph (v. 15), and there it has reference to “hair.” While the term “covered” is frequently used, it does not reveal that which does the covering. Often the word veil has been inserted into the text (cf. RSV), but the only covering that Paul specifies is the natural covering of hair (cf. Woodward 75-81).

2. In verse 4, the phrase kata kephalês echôn literally means “having something hanging down from his head” (Vincent 3:246). While the object of echôn is absent from the verse, there is no reason to supply “veil” since “long hair” (v. 15) is certainly something hanging down from the head (Murphy-O'Connor, “Sex and Logic” 483-85).

3. To make the wearing of a veil the opposite of short hair (vs. 5-6) would be a false antithesis. The only way to annul the state of being shorn is to have long hair (Martin 233).

4. The word anti in verse 15 should be rendered “instead of” (cf. Moule 71), therefore a woman’s long hair is given to her instead of a veil (Coffman 176-77).

5. Since the verb forms of katakaluptô in verses 6 and 7 have no indirect object, it is best to take them as passive (Martin 233). Instead of saying, “if a woman does not cover herself” (NASB), verse 6 should actually read, “if a woman is not covered” (NKJV). Likewise, the phrase “ought not to have his head covered” (NASB) is a more accurate rendering in verse 7 than “ought not to cover his head” (NKJV).

6. The footnote on verses 4-7 in the New International Version offers the following alternative translation:

Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering (of hair) on her head dishonors her head -- she is just like one of the “shorn women.” If a woman has no covering, let her be for now with short hair, but since it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair shorn or shaved, she should grow it again. A man ought not to have long hair.

Response to this View

While it “appears certain” to Coffman (179), and Martin is persuaded “beyond reasonable doubt” (233) that Paul is discussing only hair and not artificial coverings, not everyone is so convinced. Each of the foregoing arguments are now more closely examined.

1. The noun peribolaion (“a covering”) in verse 15 does not correspond to the verb katakaluptô used five times in verses 5-13. The inspired writer did not use kalumma (the noun form of katakaluptô) in verse 15, neither did he use periballô (the verb form of peribolaion) in verses 5-13. It stands to reason that the covering Paul mentions in verse 15 is different from the covering he had in mind in verses 5-13. The apostle affirms that a woman’s long hair is a

peribolaion, whereas there is something else which should katakaluptô her head. This may also be indicated by the fact that two different words are used to describe the shame attached to the two coverings: kataischunô in relation to the artificial covering (vs. 4-5) and atimia in relation to the natural covering (v. 14).

2. The precise meaning of kata (“down [from or upon]”) cannot be determined apart from the context (Buttmann 145-46). Since there is no object in the phrase kata kephalês echôn (“having down from the head”), the context seems to indicate that it is a covering hanging down from his head (cf. Bauer 331; Green 248; Moule 60; Robertson, Grammar 606-607).

There is no known precedence for this phrase being used in relation to hair, but there are examples of an artificial covering depicted in this way. In the Septuagint version of Esther 6.12, Haman is described as mourning with his “head covered” (kata kephalês); cf. 2 Sam. 15.30 and Jer. 14.3-4. In Plutarch’s Moralia 200.13, Scipio the Younger is said to have “his toga covering his head” (Babbitt 190-91). The phrase kata kephalês echôn is identical to the wording of 1 Cor. 11.4. With these examples in mind, Paul’s statement appears to be a reference to a covering down upon the head (Moule 60), or a veil hanging down from the head (Green 248).

3. If the covering is merely long hair, then to be “uncovered” would simply mean to have the hair cut off. It would not make sense, therefore, for Paul to say that if a woman has her hair cut short, then let her also (kai) have her hair cut short. This would make Paul’s argument in verses 5 and 6 redundant. Furthermore, it is legitimate to regard the wearing of an artificial covering as antithetical to short hair in this context. Paul is saying that an uncovered woman in Corinth is “one and the same as if” her head were shaved (Moulton Grammar 3:21); i.e. one is considered just as shameful as the other.

4. While “instead of” is a valid definition of the word anti in some contexts, taking it as such

in verse 15 would make nonsense of Paul's argument (Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic" 489 n. 32). If an external covering had not been the topic of discussion in the previous verses, there is no sensible reason for Paul to say that long hair is "instead of" another covering of some kind (Fee, 1 Cor. 528-29). The word anti in this text indicates that a woman's long hair is "equivalent to" a covering or mantle (Bauer 73, 646). Even if "instead of" could be taken as the idea here, a woman's hair would be instead of a peribolaion, but not in place of a kalumma which ought to katakaluptô her head.

5. A number of scholars maintain that katakaluptetai in verse 6 is in the middle rather than the passive voice, showing that the covering is something the woman provides for herself (cf. Brooks and Winebery 102; Robertson and Plummer 231; Jackson 5-14; cf. NASB; RSV; NRSV; NIV). Even if, however, the verb is passive, this neither confirms that hair is the covering nor rules out an artificial head-dress.

6. In response to the NIV's footnote, Fee comments: "How this option made the NIV margin is a great puzzle. It does disservice to the Greek at too many places to be viable. One might allow any one of these, but their cumulative effect requires the acceptance of too many contingent improbabilities" (1 Cor. 499 n. 28).

"Put-up Hair"

Hurley proposes that the custom in view is not the wearing of an artificial covering, but a woman wearing her hair pinned up in a bun (196-201; cf. Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy 809). He appeals to ancient customs and to certain passages in the Septuagint where similar language is used. For example, in Leviticus 13.45, speaking of lepers, the phrase which includes the word akatakaluptô is variously rendered: "his head bare" (KJV), "the hair of his head shall go loose" (ASV), "the hair of his head shall be uncovered" (NASB), "let the hair of his head hang loose"

(RSV), and “let his hair be unkept” (NIV). A similar phrase in Numbers 5.18, concerning a suspected adulteress, has been variously translated: “uncover the woman’s head” (KJV), “let the hair of the woman’s head go loose” (ASV), “unbind the hair of the woman’s head” (RSV), and “he shall loosen her hair” (NIV). Related terminology is also found in Leviticus 10.6 and 21.10. While Coffman insists that the “uncovering” refers to shaving off the hair (177-78), Hurley argues that the idea is one of loosing the hair to hang freely.

Although the word “hair” has been added by some translators to the above mentioned passages, in none of the Greek or Hebrew texts is it ever mentioned. There may have been good reason to render the Hebrew word pâra‘ as “let loose,” says Walker, but “this does not necessarily mean that the LXX translators so understood it with their use of the kaluptô word-group, which would not normally have this meaning” (103-104 n. 37). The only one of these Old Testament passages which refers to women is Numbers 5.18. Regarding this text Keil and Delitzsch comment: “The loosening of the hair of the head (see Lev. xiii. 45), in other cases a sign of mourning, is to be regarded here as a removal or loosening of the female head-dress, and a symbol of the loss of the proper ornament of female morality and conjugal fidelity” (The Pentateuch 3:31-32). It was from this passage that the Talmudic law, forbidding Jewesses to walk abroad with uncovered hair, was derived (The Jewish Encyclopedia 2:530). See also Esther 6.12 and Isa. 47.2.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. A. D. 153-220) is sometimes quoted in support of the “put-up hair” position. He wrote in The Instructor 3.11: “It is enough for women to protect their locks, and bind up their hair simply along the neck with a plain hair-pin, nourishing chaste locks with simple care to true beauty” (Coxe 2:286). What is often overlooked, though, is his statement in 3.12: “Let her be entirely covered, unless she happen to be at home. For that style of dress is

grave, and protects from being gazed at. And she will never fall, who puts before her eyes modesty, and her shawl; nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face. For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled” (Coxe 2:290).

The following objections to the “piled-up hair” view are offered by Fee: (1) How is it that a man not covering his head (v. 7) is the opposite of this? (2) Verse 15 implies that long hair serves in place of a covering, not piled-up hair. (3) There is no certain evidence from the first century AD that a woman’s long hair, as opposed to piled-up hair, was ever shameful (1 Cor. 496).

Some will argue that Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 2.9, which discourages a particular hair style, shows that at least some women did not wear garments covering their hair (cf. Hurley 199-200; Terry 8). But this conclusion is not definitive. Murphy-O’Connor, who does not think Paul addresses the issue of veils, concedes that “women’s hair-styles at this period probably incorporated some form of head-covering however small” (“Non-Pauline?” 621). A Jewish woman usually concealed “every part of her hair” (The Jewish Encyclopedia 2:530-31), while other women, particularly among the Greeks and Romans, customarily wore a loose-fitting head-dress which exposed at least some of the hair (cf. Goodenough vol. 11).

The Style of Head-dress

Both internal and external evidences build a strong case for the primary covering of 1 Cor. 11.2 ff. being one of a synthetic nature. Arguments for “hair only” are not convincing enough to invalidate this conclusion. Since the covering Paul had in mind is almost certainly one which the woman was to provide for herself, what style is intended?

Different types of head-coverings appear to have been worn in ancient times. Some coverings concealed the head and face, others covered the hair but not the face, while others were loosely worn, exposing the face and part of the hair. Taking into account the cultural diversity of

Corinth's population, a variety of fashions would be expected. It is interesting that Paul's language in 1 Cor. 11.2-16 is somewhat ambiguous with reference to the type of covering. His ambiguity suggests that he was dealing with the head-covering in general without regard for any particular style.

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